EXPERIENCE AND SOLIPSISM

Thesis

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ABSTRACT

We begin by noting that the thesis that experience is never of material objects but is rather of sense-data does, when coupled with certain plausible enough empiricist theses regarding knowledge and sense, seem to lead to dramatic solipsistic challenges to common belief about the world.

After clarifying key concepts such as those of experience, sense-data, material objects and sensibilia we argue that the arguments for the specific sense-data thesis themselves require that the thesis be reconciled with the substance of common belief about the world, e.g. that there are material objects etc. However, we argue that the two principal sorts of attempt at such reconciliation, representative realism and phenomenalism, are far from immediately convincing.

On the other hand, however, we remain unconvinced by Wittgenstein's 'private language argument', the point of which seems to be to establish that experience could not be of private objects such as sense-data. Neither do we find Strawson's treatment of persons the bullwark against solipsism which it may at first appear.

In view of the difficulty into which the general thesis that experience is never of material objects leads us we give the arguments normally adduced in favour of this thesis a more thorough examination. Our main concern here is not just to establish that this thesis is mistaken but to discover precisely where and how mistakes may have been made. We identify errors in all the arguments and so continue to maintain a position of 'direct surface realism', i.e. the position that our experience is largely of the surfaces of material objects. In this way we find that we are not committed to the sense-data thesis and can, consequently, avoid the solipsistic positions into which we seemed to be forced by the thesis if we also accepted the empiricist theses of knowledge and sense.

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PART I

CHAPTER I OUR PROBLEM INDICATED

It will help us to get a clear view of our problem if we start by noting a number of quite common beliefs about the nature of the world and our experience of it. It is, for example, commonly believed that there are, in the world, large numbers of objects which occupy three-dimensional space. Such objects are generally described as 'material objects'. It is also commonly believed by people that, whatever else they may be aware of, a large part of their experience is experience of these material objects. It may be more precise to say that people believe themselves to be aware of the surfaces of material objects. It is also commonly believed by people that they are not alone and that large numbers of the material objects of which they are aware are also objects of which other people are aware.

We can now note a number of initially plausible reflections which seem to lead to positions which challenge the common sorts of belief which we have just indicated. The sorts of challenge with which we shall be concerned might be generally termed 'solipsisms'. For the moment, all we need mean by calling a view a solipsism is that the view claims that the self is, or might be, in some way, alone. It will be possible for us to distinguish three principal sorts of solipsism.

The reflection out of which our first sort of solipsism arises concerns the thought that a person can only have his experiences. He cannot, logically cannot, have any other person's experiences. It seems, then, that he has some sort of immediate evidence for the belief that he is conscious or has a mind which he necessarily lacks in the case of others. The solipsistic doubt then arises with regard to the existence of others as conscious beings or minds at all. We can call this

'sceptical other minds' solipsism. The claim here is that one cannot know if there are other minds. This can be distinguished from dogmatic other minds solipsism which would claim that there definitely were no other minds. It is hard, however, to find any plausible arguments which support this dogmatic position although it may be that some forms of mental illness involve the patient in such a belief. It is also easy to imagine some rather fantastic circumstances in which someone might, quite reasonably, come to the conclusion that there were no other minds and that he was alone. For example, the sole survivor of a nuclear holocaust might have quite good reason to think that all conscious life except his own had been eradicated and that he was alone. The commonest way to try to avoid sceptical other minds solipsism is to try to infer from the similarity which holds between the behaviour of one's own body and the behaviour of other bodies that they too must be related to a conscious subject or be conscious in very much the same way that oneself is. This move, however, like the one which originally got us into the sceptical position, has been very widely criticised. We need not go into these criticisms here for this area of other minds solipsism will not be a concern of the present dissertation. All we need to note here, in the interests of clarity, is that other minds solipsism appears prima facie to be quite compatible with the common beliefs about material objects which we indicated above, i.e. that there are such objects and that they provide objects of awareness.

The other two forms of solipsism are, however, more radical. What we shall call 'epistemological solipsism' denies that anything can be known about the external world, including material objects, while what we shall call 'metaphysical solipsism' even denies that there is any sense to talk or thought of an 'external world'. These forms of

solipsism rest on three initially plausible theses, the sense-data thesis, an empiricist thesis of knowledge and an empiricist thesis of sense.

It is concluded from certain reflections concerning hallucinations, the relativity of experience and the causal nature of experience etc. that a person cannot, after all, be aware, or at least immediately aware, of material objects as commonly believed but only of some other sort of thing which is private, transient and, in some way, mind-dependent. We can call these other sorts of object 'sense-data' and the thesis that experience is limited to such objects, the 'sense-data thesis'. It is worth noting that this use of 'sense-data' is not that of Moore where he leaves it open as to whether it will turn out that sense-data, as he defines them, are identical with the surfaces of material objects or not(I). Precisely why the reflections indicated above lead people to adopt the sense-data thesis is a matter to which we must return.

The empiricist thesis of knowledge holds that knowledge is limited by experience and the empiricist thesis of sense holds that sense, whether that of talk or thought, is similarly limited by experience. Now, of course, there is a way of interpreting these theses which makes them seem quite implausible. For, surely, we normally suppose that there are a great number of things which, while we have never actually experienced them, we can talk and think about both knowledgeably and with sense. For example, I have never been more than a few feet below the surface of the sea but it still seems that, probably partly on the basis of such experiences as I have had, I can talk and think reasonably knowledgeably and sensibly about deep-sea diving. But the suggestion that it may be on the basis of the limited experiences which

(I) See I8, p. 54.

we do have that our knowledge of and sensible reflections on other things hints at a way of interpreting our theses which does seem quite plausible. For it does seem that any knowledge or sensible thought of the world which people may have is based on experiences which they have had and that in the absence of any relevant experience at all knowledge and sensible thought would be impossible. For is it not frequently remarked that whenever people have tried to think about heaven, i.e. something of which they have absolutely no experience, they find themselves forced back on experiences which they have had? We need not here only think of the Renaissance artist's paintings of clouds and people with wings playing harps etc. but can also think of the more mystical experiences which some people have claimed. It should be made clear that we do not have any very radical form of empiricism in mind here. We do not, for example, have in mind the radical, positivistic empiricism of the moment where the objects of present experience provide the limits of knowledge and sense. We allow the objects of past experience and indeed we also allow items of a strictly non-empirical nature which nevertheless seem forced on us by the form of experience, e.g. a pure subject. On the other hand it is worth noting that if we reject outright any form of empiricist thesis of knowledge or sense it becomes hard to see why there should be any limits to knowledge or sense at all. Why should we not have knowledge and be able to think with sense about all sorts of things which lie beyond our experience? The essential point here really is not that experience per se provides the limits of knowledge and sense but rather that the type of experience provides such limits. That is to say, if experience is exclusively composed of sense-data then knowledge and sense will be limited to sense-data, both actual and possible, except, perhaps, for items of a

purely logical nature forced on us by the form of experience. However, knowledge and sense could not extend to material objects which would be of a type of which we had absolutely no experience. We shall not examine these empiricist theses of knowledge and sense further but take it, for the purposes of the present dissertation, that, roughly stated as they have been, there is some essential core of truth to them(I).

It is, then, this rather plausible interpretation of the empiricist thesis of knowledge which, when coupled with the sense-data thesis, seems to lead to epistemological solipsism where we could not know anything of any external world beyond sense-data. We call this 'epistemological solipsism' for it amounts to the claim that 'for all I know I might be alone'. Similarly, it is this rather plausible interpretation of the empiricist thesis of sense which, when coupled with the sense-data thesis, seems to lead to metaphysical solipsism. For the metaphysical solipsist argues that since his experience is limited to private objects of the sense-data type he has absolutely no relevant experience on which he can base sensible thought or talk about things 'beyond' these objects. No matter how many such objects he has access to he still has nothing which enables him to make the qualitative jump from sensible and coherent thought about sense-data, actual and possible, to sensible and coherent thought about things of which he has absolutely no experience. He concludes, 'The world, in the only way in which I can attach any genuine sense to such a notion, is limited to me and the fleeting, private and mind-dependent sense-data of which I am or could be conscious; beyond this simply lies nonsense. The world is mine, it depends on me and I am alone, even to speculate on "others" is to fall into nonsense'. It is important to note that the metaphysical solipsist is <u>not merely denying the existence</u> of an external world beyond his private sense-data

(I) For a methodological justification of this see below p. 8.

experience but is denying sense to thought of such a world, i.e. the world of common belief which we indicated at the beginning of this dissertation. Whether the conclusions of the epistemological solipsist and the metaphysical solipsist are justified or even coherent are issues to which we must return.

We are, however, already in a position to make a number of observations of a fairly general sort. First, we can note the general character of our problem. We started by indicating a few very common beliefs about the nature of the world and our experience of it but now, after just a little reflection on what seemed initially plausible enough views, we seem to have been led to a number of different, though related, sorts of challenge to the original common beliefs. First it seemed that we could not be as certain of other minds as we could be of our own. Second it seemed that we are never aware, or at least immediately aware, of material objects, as commonly believed, but rather of sense-data which are held to be private, transient and mind-dependent. We noted that this sense-data thesis, when coupled with our empiricist thesis of knowledge, prompted the thought that we could know nothing of the external world at all. Finally if we coupled the sense-data thesis with our empiricist thesis of sense we seemed to be led to the conclusion that the common beliefs with which we began were not simply false but lacking in sense. We started then with a number of views, none of which seemed conspicuously implausible, and yet when we try to trace out the implications of these views various sorts of contradiction seem to arise. In possessing this character our problems are not untypical of most, if not all, philosophical problems.

Second, we can note the strong empiricist thread which runs through the various sorts of solipsism just noted. It is, after all, the

thought that only I can have my experiences which prompts other minds solipsism. It is the notions that knowledge is limited by experience and that experience is limited to sense-data which prompt epistemological solipsism. Finally, it is the notions that sense is limited by experience and that experience is limited to sense-data which prompt metaphysical solipsism.

Third, we should note that so far we have made considerable use of the word 'seems'. We have said that it seems as if the sense-data thesis, when coupled with certain other theses, leads to positions which challenge our common beliefs. This is quite deliberate for, of course, there are many philosophers who will deny that the sense-data thesis does, in any serious way, lead to such challenges. I have in mind here, in particular, the representative realist and the phenomenalist. The representative realist claims that, although experience is of sense-data, we can infer, quite legitimately, from these sense-data quite a lot about the external world and the material objects which occupy it. The phenomenalist, on the other hand, treats the external world, not as something which has to be infered from sense-data but as something which is reducible, in some way, to sense-data. We have, then, left the issue of whether the sense-data thesis really does lead to such challenges quite open for the moment. For, while I think that we shall find reason to suppose that the sense-data thesis really does lead to such challenges, it would, perhaps, not be altogether fair to jump to this conclusion without at least some discussion. Consequently, we shall spend a little time in the second part of this dissertation in discussion of the theories of the representative realist and the phenomenalist as well as some of their variations.

Finally, here, we can outline a strategy for dealing with our problem. We have already accepted that the representative realist and phenomenalist should be given a chance to reconcile the sense-data thesis with the common beliefs which we originally indicated. However, let us assume, for the moment, that this reconciliation is not effected. It would then seem that we must have gone wrong in our reasoning somewhere and our first task would be to decide where we should start looking to discover where and how we have gone wrong. Our common beliefs are, I suggest, to be sacrificed only as a last resort. This leaves the sense-data thesis and our empiricist theses of knowledge and sense. It might be felt that there is not all that much to choose between them as far as initial plausibility goes. However, we can note that if we start with the sense-data thesis and find it mistaken then both epistemological and metaphysical solipsism fall. However, it seems that if we begin with our empiricist thesis of sense and find it mistaken then while metaphysical solipsism would fall epistemological solipsism would not. On the other hand it would seem we could not disprove our empiricist thesis of knowledge unless we had first disproved our empiricist thesis of sense. For how could one have knowledge in the absence of sense. If we are, then, looking for a start it seems that the wise policy to adopt is to start with the sense-data thesis and try to kill two birds with one stone. We shall, however, try, not just to show that the sense-data thesis is mistaken but precisely how and where this mistaken thesis has arisen. Before any of this, however, we must try to get a little clearer about some of the key concepts with which we will be involved. So far we have made extensive use of the terms 'experience', 'sense-data' and 'material object' with only the very roughest of indications regarding what we take to be their reference. Our immediate task, then, will be one of conceptual clarification.

CHAPTER 2 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Experience

The word 'experience' is in such general use, both in ordinary life as well as in philosophy, that, unless we are careful to say precisely what we mean by it, it can scarcely fail to give rise to confusion. If, in ordinary life, a person tells us that his experience of life has led him to the conclusion that honesty is always the best policty then it seems fairly clear that here the word 'experience' is intended to include a rich and complex fabric of individual judgements with regard to the telling of lies on particular occasions and the telling of truth on particular occasions. This sort of use of the term 'experience' to refer to something which includes some element of judgement or conceptualization is also common enough in philosophy. This is especially true of the Kantian literature where to experience something, in a Kantian way, would seem to be to experience something as a such and such, i.e. as falling under some concept or other. This use of 'experience' is clearly described by Professor Strawson when he writes as follows. 'Concepts which enter into our basic or least theoretical beliefs, into our fundamental judgements, are just those concepts which enter most intimately and immediately into our common experience of the world. They are what - special training apart - we experience the world as exemplifying, what we see things and situations as cases of. Correlatively, experience is awareness of the world as exemplifying them. We should not say that judgements at this level are made on the basis of experience. Rather we should say that at this level judgement, concept and experience are merged; that seeing and believing really are, at this level, one'(I). We might also just note here that the word 'perceive' is also frequently used in a similar fashion to refer to something which involves some

(I) See 27, pp. I4-5.

degree of judgement or conceptualization.

Yet, at other times, though less frequently these days, people may use the term 'experience' with a notion of some sort of crude, totally unconceptualized data in mind. 'Experience', on this view, refers to what we have of the 'given', i.e. that which provides the objects of conceptualization or judgement but not to something which includes any element of conceptualization or judgement; as Strawson would say, the 'basis' for judgements. Indeed, it would seem that 'experience', in our first sense, must include 'experience', in this, our second sense, i.e. it must include some given. That the word 'experience' can be legitimately used in this narrower way to refer to that which we have of the given seems to be accepted even in Strawson's description of 'experience' in its broader more inclusive sense. For there he talks of this broader experience as that in which 'judgement, concept and experience are merged'(I). And yet there are a few who would resist this distinction between the given and the judgements etc. which we make with regard to it.

It might go some way towards appeasing those people if we note at once that when we claim that there is such a distinction to be made we need not be claiming that it is psychologically possible for anyone to have an unconceptualized experience, i.e. to have experience, in our second narrower sense, of the given without forming some sort of judgement on it. Neither does the claim that there is a distinction to be made between the given and the conceptualizations we make with regard to it mean that the given, by itself, would be of any use to us. It might indeed be nothing but James's 'blooming, buzzing confusion' but, of course, it would not even be recognized as such without an element of conceptualization, for to think of something as a blooming, buzzing confusion is itself to apply concepts to that thing. In this connection

(I) My italics.

it is worth noting that even to see the world in focus requires a contribution from the person involved, in the focusing of his eyes etc., which might be loosely described as 'conceptual'. We might still claim, however, that there is a distinction to be drawn between the given, poor thing though it may be, and conceptualization and judgement. For it is when people want to say that I actively, by focusing my eyes, create the sharp edges of material objects etc. that we feel, with justice, that things have gone too far.

It is just possible to discern another hazy thought lurking behind the general unwillingness to admit the distinction between the given and conceptualization. It has however, at least to my knowledge, never been explicitly stated and we shall see that once it is it turns out to be quite confused. The thought might be put as follows. It is impossible to even conceive of an unconceptualized given for to conceive of such a thing would, ipso facto, be to conceptualize it. We can, therefore, make no use of the notion of an unconceptualized given in our reasoning. The essential point in the thought seems to be that because we cannot conceive without concepts we cannot conceive of something unconceptualized for the concept of an unconceptualized is a contradiction. But, of course, it is not a contradiction and when people say it is then they are confusing it with the notion of a concept which is not a concept which is contradictory. We do have such a concept as the concept of the unconceptualized for if we have the concept of thigs conceptualized at all we must have the correlative concept of things unconceptualized. Because that concept, i.e. the concept of the unconceptualized, is itself a concept does not mean that we cannot have it and make use of it. We might as well say that because we cannot think without thought we cannot use the thought of something which is not a thought in our reasoning.

I said above that this thought which lay behind the unwillingness to admit a distinction between the given and conceptualization or concepts had never been explicitly stated. However, it is a thought precisely parallel, in all essential respects, to Berkeley's famous argument adduced in an attempt to establish the impossibility of anything existing 'independent and out of all minds whatsoever'. In the Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous Hylas claims that it is quite easy to 'conceive a tree or a house existing by itself, independent of, and unperceived by any minds whatsoever'. However, Philonous, speaking for Berkeley, asks 'Is it not (a) great contradiction to talk of conceiving a thing which is unconceived?'. Hylas agrees that it is. Philonous then responds 'The tree or house which you think of, is conceived by you'. Again Hylas agrees. Philonous' next move is to claim that 'what is conceived, is surely in the mind'. Once again Hylas agrees. Finally, Philonous asks rhetorically 'How then came you to say, you conceived a house or a tree existing independent and out of all minds whatsoever?'. The crucial part of the argument is where Philonous holds that it is a 'contradiction to talk of conceiving a thing which is unconceived'. Clearly, it is true that there cannot be a thing which is both conceived and unconceived. The notion of such a thing would be contradictory. However, there is no contradiction involved in conceiving of a thing as unconceived. Of course, in doing so one conceives of the thing in question but one is not, because of this, bound to conceive of it as being conceived. One is at liberty to conceive of it as being unconceived. In just the same way, whenever one thinks of the world before the advent of conscious life one must, of course, think of it, and consequently it becomes the object of thought, but one is not required to think of it as the object of thought. One

can think of it as existing independent of all thought. Berkeley's claim is like the claim that we cannot speak about a world without language, or even anything extra-linguistic, because we require language in order to speak

We can note incidentally here that if the distinction between the given and conceptualization is denied this would, straight away, seem to give the solipsist a start. For if there is no distinction between the given objects of experience and conceptualization and conceptualization is, as it might be generally agreed to be, a mind-dependent activity then the objects of experience in general would be mind-dependent, i.e. lacking any element at all of mind-independence. The solipsist then might argue against the Kantian notion of an impersonal mind and claim rather that minds are personal and discrete. He then might hold, not altogether implausibly, that concepts inhere in those personal discrete minds and, consequently, so do the objects of experience. It follows that the objects of my experience inhere in my personal and discrete mind and are private to me.

Again it would seem that the given and conceptualization are distinguishable for we can perfectly well understand what it would be to experience something as an X which we later experienced as a Y and accepted that it was not an X but a Y all along without feeling compelled to say that we actually experienced two different things. Wittgenstein's rabbit/duck drawing provides an example here. We can experience it as a rabbit or as a duck or as a curving line with a dot or as an example used in philosopher's discussion. But the given is that which is common to all those experienceings as. If there was no given then it is hard to see why we talk of something as being experienced in these ways. If there were no given should we not say that there

was no such thing but just a sequence of experiences? The rabbit/duck drawing would loose its peculiar charm, although it might gain a different sort of charm, if it actually were the case that, as in a fade-over in a cinema film, one thing changed to another, i.e. a drawing of a rabbit actually changed to a different drawing of a duck.

Finally here we might just note that our ordinary forms of speech are in accord with the view that there is a distinction to be made between the given and conceptualization etc. For the word 'conceptualize' and the word 'judge' are both transitive verbs requiring an object.

I have said quite a lot in defence of the view that there is a distinction to be drawn between the given and conceptualization and knowledge for this distinction will be a recurring theme of the present dissertation. I shall use the term 'experience' in the second sense indicated, i.e. in the sense in which we might say that it is the given which we experience. Consequently, when the sense-data theorist claims that experience, or immediate experience, is of sense-data I shall interpret him as claiming that experience, or immediate experience, in the sense I have chosen to use the term 'experience', is of sense-data and never of material objects, i.e. that the given is never a material object and always something private, transient and mind-dependent.

'Immediate' and 'Mediate' Experience

So far we have allowed the sense-data theorist his use of the expression 'immediate experience' and the implied distinction between this and 'mediate experience'. The time has come, however, to see if this distinction is really legitimate. Clearly, there is a prima facie plausible view that experience is something which one only has at first hand and that to experience something mediately, or at second hand, is

simply not to experience that thing at all. In reading a book about climbing to the top of Everest one may experience a number of things and learn a great deal about what it is like to climb Everest but one does not actually experience climbing Everest. The term 'experience', even as used at this ordinary level, seems to be one which resists qualification by the adjectives 'mediate' or 'immediate'. Some people who hold to the sense-data thesis would, however, want to say that our immediate experience is of sense-data which gives us mediated experience of material objects. We experience material objects via sense-data. But, as I have suggested, to experience a material object via sense-data is simply not to experience, in the sense we are using the term, i.e. the sense in which we say that we experience the given, a material object at all. It is important to note here that I am not prejudging the issue as to whether the sense-data theorist of the representative realist sort can successfully argue that legitimate inference to material objects can be made from experience of sense-data. All I am claiming is that experience of the given is not the sort of thing which admits of the separation into immediate and mediate. Something is either data or not data, given or not given, experienced or not experienced. The plausibility of the immediate/mediate distinction here rests, to some extent, on the confusion of the two senses of 'experience'. The sense-data theorist could say that experience, in our narrower sense, is of sense-data but that experience, in the broader sense which includes rational proceedures such as conceptualization, judgement and inference, could also be of material objects. But, of course, this assumes that inference from sense-data to material objects is possible.

The Subject/Object Dualism of Experience

The final point which we may make here is the purely analytic one that essential to our concept of experience are the concepts of an object of experience and a subject of experience. The notions of an experience without a subject or an experience without an object are incoherent notions. This essential dualism is reflected in the use of terms such as 'data' and 'given' for how could we have data which were not data to anything or a given which was not given to anything. The subject would simply seem to be that which experiences objects, the quite non-empirical item for which Hume ironically searched in vain(I) and which seems forced on us, not by anything in the content of experience but simply by the <u>form</u> of experience. We are now in an area which has given rise to a lot of confusion. At the heart of this confusion seems to be the mistaken identification of an experience with an object of experience. It follows from the purely analytical point just made that <u>experiences</u> are necessarily private. We count experiences by reference to subjects. A single object experienced by two subjects must give rise to two experiences. Yet, and this is crucial, there is nothing here which involves the necessary privacy of the <u>object</u> of experience and it is the notion that there is which sometimes leads to solipsistic problems. For sometimes philosophers speak of certain objects of experience as being necessarily, as opposed to contingently, private and this seems to be a mistake for reasons which we shall see shortly. Indeed we may think that talk in terms of experiences rather than in terms of subjects and objects of experience has led to unnecessary philosophical problems by making it seem as if there are three items of the same type involved; a subject, an object and a third item, the experience, a sort of pseudo-object, somehow hovering in between the

(I) See I3, p. 252.

subject and object. We need not say that there are no such things as experiences but we might be inclined to say that they are, at least, things of a different type from, and perhaps logically parasitic on, the more fundamental subject and object. These are considerations to which we will have to return.

Our task now must be to continue the process of conceptual clarification and to try to get a little clearer about what, precisely, is involved when it is claimed that experience is of sense-data. We shall see, in consequence of our conceptual enquiry, that sense-data and material objects do not exhaust the prima facie possible objects of experience. There remains a case for sensibilia, i.e. objects which may be public, sustained and mind-independent and yet not material objects. It follows from this that in claiming that experience is of sense-data one is not simply claiming that experience is not of material objects but is also claiming that experience is not of sensibilia. In turn, it follows that it is one thing to prove that experience is not of material objects and quite another to prove that experience is of sense-data. We shall recognize this distinction in our present treatment. For here, in Part II, we shall discuss the arguments adduced in favour of the view that experience is specifically of sense-data. In Part III, however, we shall discuss the arguments for the less specific view that experience is simply never of material objects. Here, in Part II, we shall suggest that the arguments for sense-data themselves rest on a picture of the world which is essentially that of common belief. It follows that if the sense-data theorist is going to make good his claim he must establish that his sense-data thesis can be reconciled with this common picture. We shall then go on, as promised, to examine some attempts at such a reconciliation, e.g. representative realism and phenomenalism. First, however, our conceptual clarifications.

The Privacy, Mind-Dependence and Transience of Sense-Data

Above, in connection with the subject/object dualism of experience, we introduced the notion of necessary privacy and remarked that, although

it seemed clear that experiences were necessarily private for the purely analytic reason that the concept of an experience included the concept of a subject, nothing yet seemed to force on us the conclusion that objects of experience were necessarily private. In this connection we also noted that the claim that the objects of experience were necessarily private was distinguishable from the claim that they were contingently private. Indeed, some sense-data theorists have claimed that sense-data are necessarily private while others have claimed that they are contingently private. In the following discussion we shall indicate the various thoughts which lie behind these claims and argue that no sense-data, indeed no object of experience, could possibly be necessarily private. Consequently, at best, the sense-data theorist's claim must be that the objects of experience are contingently private.

The claim that the objects of experience are necessarily private would seem to rest on the thought that the object of experience is a state of the subject. It does, indeed, seem that a state of a thing is necessarily private to that thing. The point here then would be that a sense-datum is nothing but a state of a particular subject. Now, we need not here get involved in the mind/body problem as such. Indeed, I believe that in the course of this dissertation we shall see reason to regard the dualism of mind and body as somewhat bogus. However, it may perform a purely explicatory function if, from time to time, we cash out certain claims in mind/body terms. For example, if we wanted to cash out the thought that a sense-datum was simply a state of a particular subject in terms of a materialist theory of mind it might run as follows. A subject simply is a particular central nervous system and the objects of that subjects experiences are simply states of that central nervous system. We might just note here that we shall later see reason to

regard this identification of a subject, i.e. a pure subject which has experiences, with a content, or possible content, of experience, e.g. a central nervous system, is necessarily impossible to make[I]. If, on the other hand, we want to put this ground for the necessary privacy of the objects of experience in terms of Cartesian dualism we might say that a subject just is a soul or mind and an idea is simply a state of that mind or, as Descartes himself put it, a 'modification' of that mind.

However, we must now enquire if the notion on which the claim of necessary privacy rests, i.e. the notion of a thing and its states, can give an adequate account of experience. Here the matter seems highly doubtful. For, as we have seen, it seems that essential to our concept of experience is the concept of a subject of experience and the concept of an object of experience. But it is hard to see how this fundamental distinction between the subject of experience and the object of experience can be accommodated by the notion of a single thing and its states. For it seems that we must either identify this thing with the pure subject of experience, in which case its states must be identified with the pure subject also, in which case we have no object, or we must identify the states of this thing with objects, in which case the thing itself must be similarly identified which leaves us without a subject. Of course, we might identify one spatial or temporal part of the thing with the pure subject and another spatial or temporal part with the object but now we have divided the thing to accommodate our subject/object dualism and consequently the claim to <u>necessary</u> privacy is undermined. For it is a purely contingent matter that the <u>parts</u> of a thing are related as they are. Throughout this objection we have, of course, for the sake of argument, allowed that it might just be possible to identify a pure subject with some empirical thing.

I See below pp. I2I-4.

We must now turn to the issue of contingent privacy. The point here seems to be that it just happens, for purely contingent reasons, that a sense-datum, although an entity distinct from the subject, can only be a datum to one subject. Again, in materialist terms, we might think of this sort of claim as follows. The central nervous system is a complex interconnected system. Some part or parts of it might be thought of as identical with the subject of experience while other parts provide the objects of experience, i.e. the data for the subject. It just happens to be the case that those particular parts are related as they are and so the objects of which the subject has experience, while private, i.e. no other subject has experience of them, are simply contingently private. Again, cashed out in terms of body/mind dualism the basis for the belief that ideas are contingently private seems to lie in the assumption that there is a pairing of minds to brains and that an idea, which is regarded as a causal consequent of a brain state, present to a mind can be present only to that mind because of this pairing. The pairing is, however, not a necessary pairing, it just happens to obtain and so privacy is again contingent. It is just worth noting here incidentally that Strawson has exploited the merely contingent nature of this alleged pairing in his paper 'Self, Mind and Body'(I). In an anti-Cartesian spirit he challenges the body/mind dualist to show why there should be only one mind per brain and not large numbers of minds per brain.

The conclusion here, then, is that it is not at all clear how we might be justified in regarding any object of experience as necessarily private, i.e. necessarily the object of some subject. It seems, then, that it must be a purely contingent matter that some particular subject has access to some particular object of experience. So, if an object is

(I) See 25.

private at all it must be purely contingently private. Whether a convincing case can be made out by the sense-data theorist for all objects of experience being private in this way is, however, a matter to which we must return.

We must now turn to the question of sense-data and its so-called 'mind-dependence'. The first problem here is to get clear about what, precisely, the rather vague expression 'mind' refers to. It seems that in some contexts what is intended is subject-dependence. In others something more like brain-dependence is intended. Finally, we may suspect that a few philosophers use the expression 'mind-dependent' in characterizing the objects of experience without being at all clear about what, precisely, they mean. Some may not even appreciate fully the exceptionally vague nature of the expression 'mind'.

Let us start with the notion of subject-dependence. First we must note that it is clear that if the objects of experience were simply states of the subject then they would be dependent, i.e. logically or necessarily dependent, on that subject. However, we have already noted the innadequate nature of the notion of a thing and its states with regard to the essential subject/object dualism of experience. We must, then, reject the claim that the objects of experience are logically or necessarily dependent on the subject, at least if it is made on the basis of a thing and its states. It is, moreover, not clear what other plausible grounds might be advanced in support of the claim that the objects of experience are logically or necessarily dependent on the subject.

It follows that if the objects of experience are dependent on the subject but not necessarily dependent on it then it must be the case that they are contingently dependent on the subject. But what, we might

wonder, does contingent dependence amount to here. It seems that it can only be a causal dependence. However, it is worth noting here that the purely non-empirical nature of the subject makes it hard to see how it might be considered to have any causal efficacy. We can conclude here that the dependence of the object of experience on the subject cannot be a logical one and that it is not at all clear how it might be considered a contingent, i.e. a causal one either.

The subject-dependence of the objects of experience does not appear to be a very promising line. However, the brain-dependence of the objects of experience seems, prima facie at least, a good deal more promising. Indeed, it seems that most philosophers who claim the objects of experience to be 'mind-dependent' really mean brain-dependent and the most celebrated arguments in favour of such 'mind-dependence' are based on observations of the workings of the brain and central nervous system etc.

The point of claiming that the objects of experience are transient seems to be to claim that they come into and go out of existence just as they are experienced by the subject. Such transience would seem to follow, not from privacy, for an object may be private, i.e. object to only one subject, without coming into and going out of existence in this way, but from some sort of dependence. And again, while, as we have noted, it is not easy to see how an object might be subject-dependent in either a logical or contingent way it is relatively easy to see how transience may result from the brain-dependence of such objects. This is so whether they are regarded simply as states of the brain or as distinct entities generated by the brain.

The conclusions which we must take away with us from this discussion of sense-data are that if the objects of experience are

private at all they cannot be necessarily private but only contingently private; similarly they cannot be necessarily dependent on the subject and it seems highly doubtful if they could be considered contingently dependent on the subject either. However, they may well be dependent on the brain. And if they are transient at all, in the manner suggested, this would seem to follow from their dependence on the brain.

Material Objects and Sensibilia

It is frequently thought that the characteristics of publicity and/or permanence and/or mind-independence are the very defining characteristics of material objects. And in asserting that the objects of experience were private and/or transient and/or mind-dependent one is, ipso facto, asserting that they are not material objects. This sort of view is very common but I believe we shall see that it is mistaken.

It is, after all, not hard to think of a material object which is both private and transient. For example, the puff of steam or melting ice-cube which only I see. It might be said here that mere privacy of the sort here exemplified is not the issue but rather necessary privacy or something called 'privacy in principle'. However, we have just seen that no object of experience, even a sense-datum, can be necessarily private. Further, we shall see that the expression 'private in principle', if it is to have any philosophically interesting content at all, can only mean necessarily private(I).

It is, perhaps, not so easy to think of a material object which is mind-dependent, or at least one which is mind-dependent in the required way. Of course, in a way, a piece of furniture is dependent on the mind of the furniture maker. However, all we really need here, since our concern is with alleged defining characteristics, is to establish that

(I) See below p. 54.

the conception of a mind-dependent material object is not inconsistent. Here things are somewhat easier for there seems nothing inconsistent in the notion of someone causing a chair to materialize simply by an act of concentration. Similarly, we may not believe the claims of Uri Geller to bring about alterations in material objects simply by an act of concentration, not because we feel them to be logically inconsistent but simply because we consider them contingently false. We have been speaking here simply of 'mind-dependence' and it may be thought that we are, consequently, guilty of just that crime of vagueness with which we earlier charged the sense-data theorist. However, it is not difficult to qualify our claims here in a way which makes them quite specific. For example, supposing acts of concentration resulting in materialization and the alteration of material bodies etc. were found to correlate invariably with quite peculiar patterns of brain activity might we not then be inclined to judge that the materialized bodies etc. were brain-dependent?

It seems then that the crucial things about material objects are not publicity, permanence and mind-independence but, as we hinted at the beginning of this dissertation, their occupation of three-dimensional space. This, of course, is not to say that many material objects are not public, permanent and mind-independent. However, if publicity, permanence and mind-independence are not the defining characteristics of material objects then there is at least the logical possibility that there might be public, permanent and mind-independent entities which are not material objects. Indeed, on occasions it has been argued that there are such entities, e.g. universals on a realist theory. However, our concern here is not with universals but rather with sensibilia. Russell described sensibilia as these 'objects which

have the same metaphysical and physical status as sense-data without necessarily being data to any mind'. The notion of a sensible is then a close relation of the notion of a sense-datum only, of course, it is regarded as an entity which could continue to exist unobserved etc. Perhaps an analogy might be provided here by the notion of a cine eye-viewer. In such a device the images on the film remain, even when not being observed. Whether the images on the film represent a reality beyond, as a representative realist might think, or are themselves the component parts of material objects etc., as the phenomenalist might claim are the sort of questions to which we will return.

It is worth noting here that if all we have said here is the case then the recent concentration on the specific issue of privacy, e.g. Wittgenstein's 'private language argument' and its associated literature, is, in all probability, going to turn out much less fruitful than it may, at first, have been hoped. For even if it were possible to establish that the objects of experience could not be private this would not, as we have seen, establish that they must, after all, be ordinary material objects.

Finally, here, however, we must enter a qualification. At the outset we contrasted the common belief that large tracts of our experience are of material objects with the less common belief that experience is really of sense-data. And recently we have put considerable emphasis on the notion that the crucial thing about material objects is their occupation of three-dimensional space. But it might be claimed by a sense-data theorist who is also a materialist that sense-data are material objects too and occupy three-dimensional spaces, i.e. spaces in the brain. And from this it might be wondered what has become of our contrast between common belief and sense-data theory since, on this

materialist interpretation, both views hold that our experience is of material objects. We need not here dispute the materialist's claim, although in another context we might wish to. All we need note here is that there remains a striking contrast between common belief and the sense-data thesis, even on a materialist interpretation. For, of course, common belief does not hold that the material objects of which we have experience are situated in our brains but rather in those sorts of spaces in which common belief customarily considers them to be placed. It should, then, be understood that when we talk of material objects and contrast them with sense-data we mean objects occupying, by and large, those sorts of space which common belief considers them to occupy.

CHAPTER 3 SENSE-DATA AND COMMON BELIEF

Why Sense-Data?

Towards the end of the last chapter we noted that sense-data were not the only possible alternatives to material objects. It seemed that the objects of experience might possibly be sensibilia. Let us then, for the moment, accept that the objects of experience are never material objects and enquire why it should be thought that they are specifically sense-data rather than sensibilia. For surely it is not legitimate to conclude straight away from the fact that the objects of experience are not experienced continuously but intermittently that these objects cease to exist when they are not being experienced. Nor is it safe to assume that because I, as subject, experience certain objects no other subject is so privileged. Similarly, we must ask what particular considerations suggest that the objects of experience are 'mind-dependent'.

It might be claimed that when two observers look at the same material object what each is actually aware of is an image of some sort. This is a claim to which we will return in the last part of the dissertation. These images, it would be claimed, are private because observers cannot ever occupy precisely the same position at the same time and so never experience the same image. By the time the second observer occupies the position of the first, the first must have moved on and the image which provided the object of experience of the first ceased. Consequently, such images are private and transitory. Now it is assumed here that because it takes some time for an observer to occupy the position of another then the particular image which provided the object of experience of the first observer must cease, i.e. be transient, to be, no doubt, replaced by a qualitatively similar but numerically

distinct image when the second observer is in position. Beneath this assumption seems to lie the further assumption that the object of experience is somehow dependent on the observer. It might be claimed that the image, the object of experience clearly depends on the position of the observer in relation to the material object in question. But this is ambiguous. It could mean that the object depends for its existence on the observer occupying a certain position. Or it could simply mean that which particular object is experienced depends on the position of the observer. Clearly, the second meaning is in accord with the supposition that the objects of experience are sensibilia. The first meaning is not but we still need a reason for accepting the first.

We can straight away dismiss the suggestion that it follows simply from the terminological fact that 'subject' and 'object' can be regarded as correlative terms that the object is dependent on the subject. Schopenhauer sometimes suggests this. For example, he writes that 'the empirically real in general is conditioned..by the subject; materially or as an object generally, because an objective existence is only conceivable as opposed to a subject and as its idea'(I). Of course, it is true that if we mean by 'object', 'object of experience' then there could be no such object without a subject. However, there does seem to be a sense in which 'object' is used simply to mean thing, i.e. not necessarily an object to anything, and it is, presumably, this sense which the realist has in mind when he asserts that objects, i.e. things, would, or could, continue to exist even if there were no subjects.

We can also just note here another sort of argument which is relevant. The argument in question is based on the fact of hallucinations. It might be held that the objects in hallucinatory experiences are clearly

(I) See 23, p. I70.

private, transient and mind-dependent and that they are, in themselves, qualitatively similar to the objects in ordinary experience. It is then suggested, as a consequence of this, that the objects of ordinary experience must also be private, transient and mind-dependent. This sort of argument has also been used to try to establish that experience cannot be of material objects and so we shall discuss it in detail in the final part of the dissertation(I).

We now come to the major consideration relevant here. It might run as follows. When an observer sees a material object light is reflected from the material object towards his eye. The lens of his eye focuses the light onto the retina where photo-electric cells transform the light into electrical impulses which are carried along nerves to the brain. In the brain some consequent electro-chemical activity takes place. It is concluded, precisely why is another point which we shall discuss in the last part of the dissertation, that the actual object of experience must lie somewhere at the opposite end of this causal 'chain' from the initiating material object and further, that it depends for its existence on the brain, nervous system etc. As we have already said we do not need to get involved in the mind/body problem as such but we can note here that a materialist might claim that what we are really aware of are brain states. He might then claim that since there is only one person per brain, brain states must be private. Since brain states are constantly changing, they must be transient and, most important for us here, since they are brain states they must be dependent on the brain. On the other hand a Cartesian dualist might claim that brains are paired off with non-material minds and that brains somehow present ideas, which are causally dependent on brains and their states, to the mind. From this pairing of minds and brains it is held to follow that the ideas which are

(I) See below pp. 89, 90 and 91.

presented to minds as a consequence of brain states must also be private, transient and brain-dependent.

All the above, then, is simply a bald statement of the sort of considerations which seem to lie behind the view that the objects of experience are private, transient and brain-dependent and much more remains to be said of them. All that we need note for the moment, however, is that they rest on a picture of the world substantially like that of the world of common belief which we indicated at the beginning of the dissertation. These considerations, after all, began with the notion that there are material objects and cases where people look at them and they went on to talk blithely of sensory organs, nervous systems and brains etc., all material objects. Consequently, the view that the objects of experience are of the sense-data type depends on the assumption that this view can, in the end, be reconciled with the substance of our common beliefs regarding the world. Whether this assumption is justified or not is something which we can leave till our discussions of representative realism and phenomenalism etc. but we can note now that if reconciliation cannot be effected then any plausibility which the arguments for sense-data may have must evaporate.

Some considerations just noted in favour of the view that the objects of experience are sense-data seem to be essentially the same as those Hume had in mind when he remarked that 'all our perceptions are dependent on our organs, and the disposition of our nerves and animal spirits' and concludes from this that 'our sensible perceptions are not possessed of any distinct or independent existence'(I). We can take it here that the expressions 'perception' and 'sensible perception' are intended as more or less synonymous with our expression 'object of experience'. For, of course, if we take 'perception' simply as

(I) See I3, pp. 2I0-2II.

equivalent to 'experience' it is clearly true that a perception is causally dependent on the brain and nervous system etc. For we have every reason to think that experiences are causally dependent on brains etc. and that if there were no brains, sensory organs, etc. then there would be no experiences. It would follow that an experience or perception, in this sense, would be dependent on the brain and nervous system. Price also notes that Hume's sort of argument starts from material objects and goes on to attack Hume on the grounds that sense-data are 'always too few and fragmentary' to support the account of material objects which the argument in favour of sense-data and against sensibilia requires(I). We, however, must first get a little clearer about the precise nature of the various attempts which have been made to reconcile the sense-data thesis with the world of common belief.

(I) See I9, p. II6.

Representative Realism and Phenomenalism

At the beginning of this dissertation we noted that certain reflections seemed to lead away from the common belief that we are aware of material objects towards the belief that the objects of experience are really sense-data. This belief, by itself, did not seem too bad but we noted that when we coupled it with two other fairly plausible views we seemed to be forced into a very uncomfortable position indeed. When coupled with an empiricist theory with regard to the limits of knowledge we found that our sense-data thesis seemed to lead us to epistemological solipsism and when coupled with our empiricist theory with regard to the limits of sense it seemed to lead to metaphysical solipsism. However, as we noted at the time, while it might seem that admission of the initially plausible sense-data thesis together with our empiricist theses leads to absurd positions contradicting common belief it might not really be so. Of course, a rationalist philosopher might feel inclined to cast his suspicion first on our empiricist theses of knowledge and sense. It remains the case, however, that there are philosophers who would claim to be empiricists, at least in spirit, and who also accept the sense-data theory and yet would claim that they are not committed to solipsism of either sort. And, indeed, we have just noted that the claim that experience is specifically of sense-data rests on reconciling that claim with the substance of common belief, i.e. it rests on avoiding solipsism.

Here we shall be concerned with both the representative realist's and the phenomenalist's attempts to effect such a reconciliation. We shall see that it is far from clear that any easy reconciliation between the sense-data thesis and the substance of common belief offers itself and find grounds to wonder if such a reconciliation is indeed possible.

We shall also extend our discussion of phenomenalism into sensibilia phenomenalism in order to see if it was possible to reconcile the substance of common belief, not with the sense-data thesis but the thesis that experience may be of sensibilia. We shall note, however, that although sensibilia phenomenalism avoids some obvious objections brought against sense-data phenomenalism it has problems of its own.

The representative realist attempts to reconcile the view that experience is of sense-data with common belief regarding material objects etc. by claiming that the sense-data of which we have experience somehow represent material objects in the external world. However, it has been objected that if our experience is composed exclusively of ideas or sense-data then it is not at all clear how it is possible for us to infer legitimately from these sense-data to anything in the external world beyond. This has come to be known as the 'veil of ideas' problem. Descartes attempted to meet it via a proof of the existence of a non-deceiving God who guaranteed, if not particular beliefs at least a general criterion which we could apply to our beliefs. This criterion was, according to Descartes, satisfied by the belief that some ideas represented material objects in the external world. However, serious objections have been made here both with regard to the proofs offered for the existence of such a God and with regard to whether such a God could, with consistency, perform the functions which Descartes required of him. There have also been attempts to argue from causality that there must be something beyond our ideas or sense-data causing them. But even if we accept the application of the concept of causality beyond experience, and it is not clear that we should do so, it is far from clear how we could legitimately infer from experience which was exclusively of sense-data the presence of transcendent causes of which

they are the consequences. Further, it would still be very unclear precisely how sense-data represented their causes for it is clear that similar consequences can arise out of very different causes and that consequences are in no ordinary sense representatives of their causes.

One celebrated modification of representative realism involves the Lockean distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Primary qualities include such things as solidity, extension and figure etc. while secondary qualities include such things as colours, sounds and tastes etc. Locke held that our ideas of primary qualities did faithfully represent the material objects in the external world but that our ideas of secondary qualities did not. Colours etc. were, according to Locke, nothing but the powers which material bodies have to produce ideas in us as a consequence of their primary qualities. However, this modification does not really get round the veil of ideas problem. For it still remains Locke's position that all we are ever aware of are ideas, i.e. ideas of primary qualities and secondary qualities, and this being the case we still have no warrant for the inference from these ideas, whatever their precise nature, to the existence of external material objects.

The last variation of representative realism which we shall discuss here is called 'critical realism'. In the course of our discussion we shall have reason to return to a recurring theme of this dissertation, that concerning the distinction between 'experience' in our sense and 'experience' in the broader sense which includes elements of judgement etc. With this distinction in mind we shall see that advocates of critical realism are mistaken in claiming that critical realism is quite distinct from any form of representative realism. In an article Professor Hirst, who seems favourable to critical realism, claims that

the fault of representative realism lies 'in its failure to analyze perceiving or perceptual knowledge'(I). He goes on, 'accepting the ordinary notion of perceiving as intuiting, which means direct awareness or confrontation, and finding that because of the causal processes and of illusions such awareness was not of external objects, Locke concluded that it must be of intramental ideas and so imprisoned us in the circle of such ideas'. Locke may have done this but it is not at all clear that everyone who might fairly be called a representative realist fails to distinguish between perception and intuition. Hirst proceeds, 'the more reasonable conclusion, however, would be that the ordinary notion of perceiving is wrong and that a more careful analysis is needed. This will show that an essential feature of perceiving, even as ordinarily understood, is that it is the way we discover the existence and nature of external objects - that it is, in fact, a claim, often justified, to knowledge'. Indeed this is so, for we not only here allow that there is more than mere intuition to perception but have earlier pointed out in our discussion of experience that there was. However, what interests us is just how, precisely, we do make such justified claims to knowledge of external objects if our intuitions or, as we would say, experiences are limited to ideas or sense-data. Nothing in what remains of Hirst's article provides any illumination here. He says that 'though it involves an intuition or direct awareness, perceiving is much more than this. It also involves an active external reference, as implied by the knowledge claim; we refer this intuited mental content or character complex (i.e. sense-datum) to an external object, that is, we explicitly judge that it is, or is the character of, an external object or we unreflectingly take it to be this or we immediately react to it as if it were an external object'. However, our puzzle remains as to how we are,

(I) See R. J. Hirst, 'Realism' in IO, p. 8I.

with intuitions of sense-data, enabled to have perceptions, i.e. make justified knowledge claims, of external material objects. Simply to say that perception is more than mere intuition and that we just do these things, e.g. refer to external objects 'unreflectingly', does nothing to dispel our sense of philosophical unease on this issue. For that extra which perception gives in addition to intuition must be a truly wonderful thing if it enables us, on the basis of intuitions limited to sense-data, to leap over the veil of ideas and to refer to and talk intelligently about external objects beyond sense-data. It seems, then, that so-called 'critical realism' is nothing but a form of representative realism which explicitly avoids the elementary mistake of identifying intuition with perception but nevertheless fails to avoid the standard veil of ideas problem.

Hirst also remarks that 'if we remember that this knowledge claim is not always justified - that is, that there are illusions and errors - we shall avoid the other pitfall of direct realism in which error becomes inexplicable'. However, it is not at all clear that on direct realism error does become inexplicable. There might seem to be grounds for this conclusion if direct realism identified intuition with perception in the way that Hirst claimed that the representative realist did and indeed this seems to be Hirst's assumption. But there is nothing in direct realism per se which commits it to such a mistaken identification. For, as we shall note at greater length below(I), the direct realist is essentially making a claim with specific regard to the nature of experience and not with regard to the nature of knowledge. It is quite open to the direct realist to claim that we have intuitions, at least sometimes, of material objects and, at the same time, hold the view that there is more to perception, which he would agree includes

(I) See below p. 83.

knowledge claims regarding material objects, than mere intuition. It is this more, i.e. rational processes etc., which allows for error. Indeed, it looks as if Hirst, in his capacity as critical realist, has rightly seen that there is a distinction between intuition and perception, or as we put it earlier between the two senses of 'experience', but denies, quite without justification, this insight to anyone else, direct realist, representative realist or whatever.

Before we leave representative realism we might just note that if we add to the sense-data thesis our empiricist limits of sense thesis we may then wonder what sense there remains to be attached to talk of an 'external world' and of 'material objects beyond sense-data' etc. And this being the case what sense there is to be attached to the representative realist theory which itself makes conspicuous use of the notion of an external world of material objects etc. It begins to look, not just that the sense-data thesis is impossible to reconcile with common belief <u>via</u> representative realism but that representative realism is itself internally incoherent, at least on an empiricist view. We can also note that a similar incoherence seems to reside in the sense-data theory itself. For if talk of external material objects lacks sense then so too must talk of sense-data, at least as we have defined them. For we remember that our definition was not Moore's inclusive one which allowed that at least some sense-data may, in the end, turn out to be identical with the surfaces of material objects. Nor did we simply define sense-data as private, transient and mind-dependent. Indeed we have seen reason to regard this as an inadequate definition of sense-data since material objects can be both private and transient and further, mind-dependent material objects are at least conceivable. Crucial to our definition of sense-data was the requirement that they

were not material objects. And, of course, if the notion of a material object is senseless then so too must be the notion of any item which is even partially defined as not being a material object, e.g. a sense-datum. But if the notion of a sense-datum is senseless then so too must be the metaphysical solipsism which is erected on the sense-data theory. Below we shall see more grounds to regard metaphysical solipsism as an intrinsically incoherent doctrine(I).

Phenomenalism

The phenomenalist attempts the reconciliation of sense-data theory with common belief by a different strategy. He does not, like the representative realist, hold that material objects lie beyond sense-data which are their representatives. Rather he holds that material objects are simply classes of sense-data and perhaps possible sense-data. Here we can note a more empiricist spirit in phenomenalism than is to be discovered in representative realism. For the representative realist wishes to claim that we can infer from certain empirical items, i.e. sense-data, to non-empirical items, i.e. material objects. However, the phenomenalist is rightly suspicious of this inference to the transcendent and attempts to construct the world of common belief out of strictly empirical items, i.e. sense-data. In accord with our present century's concern with language the form of phenomenalism most common recently has been linguistic phenomenalism. The central claim of linguistic phenomenalism is that all the statements which we might reasonably want to make about material objects can be, in theory, made in terms of talk about sense-data. However, a great many objections have been brought against this claim. For example, suppose one wants to give the sense-data translation of 'there is a table next door' while there is no-one next

(I) See below p. 6I.

door who can have the appropriate sense-data. It becomes hard to see what the sense-data translation of this simple material object sentence would be like. It has been suggested that something like 'if someone were next door etc. then he would have the sense-data XYZ' might do the trick. But then it might be objected that this fails as a pure translation for it includes a reference to a material object, i.e. the room next door. It has, however, been further suggested that this objection might be overcome by translating talk of next door into sense-data terms as well. For example, 'If you had sense-data ABC (i.e. the sense-data appropriate to being next door etc.) then you will have sense-data XYZ'. But even this fails, for in the material object sentence a particular next door is referred to, however, in the sense-data translation no such particular item is referred to. One could be in a similar room elsewhere and have sense-data ABC without sense-data XYZ. It seems, then, that it would be necessary to specify the sense-data appropriate to approaching that particular room and so on until an immensely, we might even think infinitely long sequence of sense-data had been specified. And this not just for one possible route through life to the table but for other possible routes too. On top of all this we should note that the number of sense-data which could be yielded by a simple material object would be immense even, perhaps, infinite. For the number of sense-data which vary with 'position' (both angle and distance) must be immense but we can add to these the sense-data which arise when other conditions change, e.g. both the external lighting conditions and the internal constitution of the observer (cases of jaundice etc.). Presumably, an adequate translation of a simple material object statement would have to specify all these conditions prior to stating the appropriate sense-

data to be experienced.

However, even if we let this pass problems remain. For the suggested translation is of quite a different form from the original material object statement. The translation being hypothetical in form while the original was categorical. This, by itself, should be enough to make quite unconvincing any such attempted translations. Indeed, the translation of some quite ordinary material object statement can turn out to be quite absurd. For example, Professor Williams has pointed out(I) that the translation of 'Even if there were no observers certain material objects would still exist' becomes 'If there were no observers, then if there were observers they would have sense-data XYZ etc.'.

Indeed, it is worth noting here that even Professor Ayer, phenomenalism's most celebrated recent advocate, has himself declared, for reasons much like those above, that he no longer thinks that phenomenalism, as we understand it, can be made to work. In The Central Questions of Philosophy he writes 'If the demand for an adequate translation requires that the statements referring to percepts set out neccessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of the statements about a physical object which they are meant to replace, I think it is unlikely that it can be satisfied'(2).

Sensibilia Phenomenalism

The interest of the notion of sensibilia in the present context lies in the fact that a phenomenalist who presented his case in terms of sensibilia rather than in terms of sense-data would avoid at least the objection concerned with the discrepancy between categorical and hypothetical forms which, as we noted above, can be directed against sense-data phenomenalism. For that objection turned on the fact that

(I) See 30, p. 8I. (2) See 2, p. I06.

where there were no observers there would be no sense-data. But if the objects of experience are sensibilia, i.e. permanent, mind-independent and, potentially at least, public items, then the translation of the statement that 'there is a table next door' simply becomes something like 'next door there are sensibilia XYZ'. Similarly, the statement about material objects existing in the absence of observers becomes something like 'even without observers there would be sensibilia XYZ etc.'

However, a number of objections have been brought against the notion of sensibilia. For example, Hirst notes that one cannot observe the existence of a sensible when it is not being sensed and so sensibilia 'are just as obscure and hypothetical as the unobserved material objects of representative realism and, in fact, introduce the very difficulty they were intended to avoid'(I). This seems, however, a little unfair on two counts. First, we might note that if the fact that something cannot be observed when it is not being observed are grounds for calling it obscure and hypothetical then everything, including material objects as we commonly think of them (i.e. not as representative realists or whatever), are obscure and hypothetical. But, of course, the tautology that things cannot be observed when they are not being observed provides, by itself, absolutely no grounds for reckoning them 'obscure and hypothetical'. It is, however, true that on a radical empiricism of the moment view such unobserved entities may be held obscure and hypothetical simply on the grounds that, at that moment, they are not being observed or experienced. However, it should be noted that it was not this radical empiricism which we earlier tentatively embraced when we remarked that we might take it that the view that experience, in some way, sets limits to ordinary knowledge of the world might have some essential core of truth to it. Neither does

(I) See R. J. Hirst, 'Phenomenalism' in IO, p. I3I.

the tautology that things cannot be observed when they are not being observed give us grounds for thinking that things cease to exist when they are not being observed. We are familiar with the sceptical question 'How can you be sure that material objects exist unobserved?' which is based on this sort of thinking. And perhaps the best response here, as it is elsewhere with many sceptical questions, is simply to put the ball back in the sceptic's court and ask him for a reason for doubting the continued existence of material objects. The tautology that they cannot be seen when they are not being seen is hardly a reason.

The second point which we must bear in mind here is that the sensibilia phenomenalist and the representative realist are not really parallel cases at all. For the representative realist attempts to infer the existence of things of which he has had no experience from other things of which he has had experience while the sensibilia phenomenalist is simply claiming that the things of which he has had experience, i.e. sensibilia, continue to exist when they are not experienced.

However, sensibilia phenomenalism still has problems. Again if our aim is the translation of ordinary material object statements into sensibilia statements the complexity of those sensibilia statements promises to be every bit as daunting as that noted in connection with sense-data statements. Further, if our experience is really just a sequence of sensibilia then the orderliness of this sequence becomes a quite inexplicable mystery. We should not be surprized, rather it is what we should expect, if we were suddenly presented with a totally incoherent sequence of sensibilia. Of course, it might be suggested here that the orderliness of sensibilia is no great problem and can be easily accounted for on the grounds that sensibilia are caused by things, e.g. material objects, beyond the actual sensibilia. But, of course,

this suggestion is not in the phenomenalist spirit at all and leads us back to some sort of Lockean representative realism. Russell, in his paper 'The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics'(I), took a line something like this. However, it is far from clear that Russell takes this line successfully. As a phenomenalist Russell defines a physical thing 'as the class of its appearances', i.e. a class of sensibilia, but he realized that such a class cannot be the cause of itself and so he posits 'matter' as distinct from physical things and the causal antecedent of the orderly arrangement of sensibilia which, on occasions at least, comprise physical things. However, the introduction of matter as distinct from physical things here seems quite gratuitous and open to the same objections, concerning the legitimacy of an inference from a number of things of which we have experience to a causal antecedent of a type which we have never experienced, which we noted before in relation to representative realism. We might also note that even if we allowed this causal inference it would not account for the precise sort of orderliness which sensibilia exhibit. For sensibilia do not just form any orderly pattern but, if we may put it this way, appear to 'picture' the world of common belief, i.e. a world of material objects as they are commonly conceived.

Now, clearly, discussion of representative realism and phenomenalism, i.e. the principal theories which accept the thesis that experience is never of material objects but rather of sense-data or sensibilia or some such but deny that this leads to either epistemological or metaphysical solipsism, could go on a long time. However, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to give these topics a really full discussion. It is enough for our present purposes to note that it is at least far from immediately clear that the sense-data thesis, or, for

(I) See 2I, p. I45.

that matter, the sensibilia thesis, can be reconciled with the substance of common belief and made compatible with non-solipsistic conclusions. Indeed, it seems that there are some very grave and, we may even feel, insurmountable obstacles in the way here. Perhaps, then, we should look elsewhere for a solution to our difficulty and as we already suggested we might be wise to start with the sense-data thesis or rather, since sensibilia seem hardly more adequate than sense-data, with the more general view that experience is never really of material objects. However, before we do this we shall discuss two of the most celebrated recent treatments of the issues with which we are concerned, I have in mind here the treatments of Wittgenstein and Strawson.

CHAPTER 4 THE PRIVATE LANGUAGE ARGUMENT AND PERSONS

Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument(I)

The point of Wittgenstein's so-called 'private language argument', and in this lies its relevance to us, seems to be to establish that the objects of experience cannot be private objects as the sense-data theorist claims. If the objects of experience were private then it would seem that, in accord with our empiricist thesis regarding the limits to sense in language and thought, the 'language' or, as we can say here in deference to the solipsist, the 'discursive thought' of the subject of these private objects would be private, i.e. its powers of reference etc. would be limited to those private objects. And, so the argument goes, there cannot be such a private language. The essential form of the argument then is this. If the objects of experience were private then there could be no language because any language, under such conditions, would have to be a private language and a private language is an impossibility. There is language, this is reasonably assumed, therefore the objects of experience cannot be private.

The basis of the argument is the quite reasonable assumption that language must be something where a question of correct and incorrect usage arises, i.e. it must be something with rules. Essentially the argument aims to show that a private language could not satisfy this condition. For the sake of argument Wittgenstein allows that a person has a private sensation and that some attempt is made to establish a connection between the sensation and the sign 'S'. The intention is that 'S' should be entered in a diary each time the same private sensation recurs. The keeping of such a diary would, however, rely on memory. If one remembered a present sensation as the same as one previously christened 'S' then one would write 'S' in the diary.

(I) See 33, section 258.

Further, in the case of the private diarist, memory is the 'highest court of appeal', consequently whatever is remembered as having been called 'S' is S, i.e. 'whatever is going to seem right..is..right'. From this then Wittgenstein concludes that 'here we can't talk about "right"', i.e. here the question of correct and incorrect usage does not arise. The 'S-game', as it has come to be called, does not employ the rules necessary for it to be considered a language and the S-game is, of course, held to be identical to a private language in all important essentials. Consequently, a private language is an impossibility.

First we might wonder why it should be claimed that 'whatever is going to seem right..is..right'. For might not the private diarist's memory be mistaken and what seemed right to him not be right at all. However, Wittgenstein may mean here that as <u>far as the private diarist is concerned</u> whatever seems right is right. But the force of the expression 'as far as the private diarist is concerned' makes this mean no more or less than what seems right to the private diarist seems right to the private diarist. But it is not even clear that the private diarist himself must identify the notions of seeming right to him and being right. For he may seem to remember occasions on which something seemed right to him but later seemed wrong to him and this would provide him with a distinction between seeming right to him and being right. He could share with us the view that seeming right to oneself is not the same as being right.

It is worth pausing for a moment here to note incidentally that Wittgenstein, here in the private language argument, <u>uses</u> the view, shared by Professors Goodman and Ayer(I), that, at some fundamental level, things are settled by the observer's decree. That is, if the observer says that something is 'red' then it is, by his decree, red.

(I) See 2, p. 94 and I2, pp. 99-IOI.

However, this view itself is rather implausible. Language is surely not just a continual christening procedure. The principal thought which lies behind this particular view concerns an attempt to avoid a particular brand of scepticism. The sceptical argument concerns the fallibility of memory. It is pointed out that, on occasions, our memories have misled us. It is then suggested that if this is so it might be the case that we are constantly making mistakes, even about such fundamental issues as our use of colour words such as 'red'. Consequently, even our use of such basic expressions as this must be subject to doubt. Now, of course, one way to block the sceptic here is to adopt this rather drastic move of claiming that the observer's decree settles what colour things are. Thus, if I now call something 'blue' then it is blue and there is no question of my being mistaken in calling it 'blue'. However, there is another more plausible way to resist the sceptic. We can accept that, on occasions, memory has misled us and that it is possible that we are mistaken even in our most basic assertions. It is these points which Goodman and Ayer reject by attempting to make such assertions incorrigible. But we can still deny that these two points, taken by themselves, provide us with any legitimate grounds at all for doubting any particular basic assertion. What we need for doubt are quite particular and coherent reasons for thinking that I may well be mistaken on some particular issue, e.g. that I have recently taken drugs etc.(I) Mere reminders of some past mistakes plus the logical possibility of present error, which is something we cannot avoid since it is a contingent world in which beliefs are generally contingently related to their objects, are not sufficient grounds for genuine doubt.

However, even if the claim that whatever is going to seem right is right is accepted there are still difficulties. For it is not clear

(I) See below p. 77.

precisely how the final conclusion of the argument that 'here we can't talk about "right"' follows from the claim that 'whatever is going to seem right to me is right'. For 'whatever is going to seem right to me is right' does not entail that some things cannot seem wrong and therefore preserve a use for 'wrong' and indeed 'right'. Thus the sense-data theorist can claim that if the S-game player remembers a sensation as one originally christened 'S' then he should call it 'S' and to call it 'not S' would be 'wrong'. Wittgenstein claims with regard to the S-game 'but in the present case I have no criterion of correctness' but here he is mistaken. Memory provides the criterion of 'correctness', i.e. the basis on which one would judge 'S' or 'not S' to be 'right' in any particular case, Nor does this, as might first be thought, dissolve completely a distinction between 'seeming right' and 'being right' for the S-game player. For, as we have already noted, it is possible that at time tI a particular sensation is remembered as the same as the one originally christened 'S' while at time t2 a third sensation is remembered as being the same as the one originally christened 'S' but not the same as the sensation experienced at time tI. In such a case, at time t2, our S-game player might make use of a 'seeming right/being right' distinction to claim that 'at time tI it only seemed right that the sensation I was having was S but now, at time t2, my present sensation not only seems to be S but is S'. It might be objected that while the sense-data theorist might claim for the S-game player a use for 'right' and 'wrong' and even a use for the distinction between 'only seeming right' and 'really being right' the 'right' and 'wrong' here are not objective rights and wrongs. It is not even clear, however, that the S-game player might not have his own use for the expression 'objectively right', a use based on his

'only seeming right' and 'really being right' distinction. Whatever our view on these particular issues it does at least seem clear that in the present case where it is claimed that 'whatever is going to seem right to me is right' there remains a place for talk of 'right' and 'wrong' and, consequently, it would appear that a private language could satisfy the requirement that it be something where a question of 'correct' and 'incorrect' usage arises, i.e. it could be something with rules.

Another point, made by Ayer, is that the speakers of what is deemed to be a public language are in essentially the same position as our S-game player. Ayer writes that 'we too are obliged in the end to rely simply on our powers of recognition. When we are referring to what we conceive to be persisting objects, we may indeed have other specimens at hand by which to check our usage. Even when this is not possible we may be able to compare our verdict with that of other speakers. But then the specimens must themselves be recognized. When other speakers are consulted, their signs or gestures have to be identified, if anything is to be learned from them. In the end we must simply decide that this is an instance of such and such a word or such and such another type of object'(I).

Indeed, we can note that this reliance on memory does not simply put the individual speaker of a public language in essentially the same position as the S-game player, as Ayer claims, but places the whole linguistic community, publicity itself, in precisely the same position as the S-game player. For if one man's memory can play tricks on him then surely so can the memories of all men. Consequently, it would be possible for the memories of the members of a linguistic community to go adrift. It would even be possible for the memories of such a community,

(I) See 2, p. 95.

or at least substantial numbers of them, to warp in accord with one another. The possibility of the collected memories warping in this fashion means, according to Wittgenstein, that whatever is going to seem right to a linguistic community is right. That is, the community, vis a vis language, is on precisely the same postion as our S-game player. Publicity, then, far from being a 'higher court of appeal' and providing the criterion for correct usage, as Wittgensteineans make out, is itself dependent on memory. The Wittgensteinean may here attempt to resist the suggestion that the linguistic uses of a community, publicity itself, depends, in the last resort, on the aggregate of the individual memories of the people who comprise that community. But if such uses are not so dependent then it becomes very hard to see what they do depend on and how they arise. The Wittgensteinean may claim that the uses of a community are just there and that is that and that our problem here is itself somehow illegitimate. As Wittgenstein himself said in the Philosophical Investigations 'What has to be accepted, the given, is - so one could say - forms of life' and in On Certainty 'Now I would like to regard this certainty...as a form of life. But that means I want to conceive it as something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were, as something animal'(I). But it is far from clear why we should be satisfied with the bald assertion that the uses are just there and that is that, i.e. that what has to be accepted are such 'forms of life'. Nor is it obvious that the question is illegitimate. Though it is tempting to label any problem which does not prompt a ready solution 'illegitimate' this, in the end, leads only to an unquestioning dogmaticism. On the other hand the Wittgensteinean might try to develop a response here by appealing to some notion of an impersonal consciousness and using this notion to suggest that publicity does not

(I) See 33, p. 226e and 32, sections 358 and 359.

depend on the individual members of a community but rather this impersonal consciousness, this group mind. Here we are reminded of the Kantian impersonal self and we shall return to a discussion of this notion later(I).

Finally we can note that the sense-data theorist will have his own reason for remaining unimpressed by the Wittgensteinean's faith in publicity for, on his view, that notion of a public is itself based on his own sense-data. Consequently, an appeal to publicity is, on his view, nothing more than a lightly disguised appeal to memories of sense-data.

We can conclude, then, that the private language argument fails. However, it will be useful in attempting to get a clear view of the geography of our topic if we trace out some of the implications which the success of the private language argument would have had. First we can note that, as earlier observed, sense-data are not the only possible private objects of experience. Material objects too could be private objects of experience. We might now imagine some desert island devoid of conscious life except for one individual who survived without ever having known what it was to grow up in a linguistic community. Clearly the experience of such an individual could well be limited to private objects. The success of the private language argument would have denied to this individual the possibility of developing his own language, no matter how rudimentary. This, we might feel, is not too bad for certainly we would not expect such an individual to engage in much, if any, explicit utterance of a linguistic kind. However, we must remember that the term 'language' in the Wittgensteinean literature is frequently taken to stand, not just for explicit utterance but also for coherent discursive thought itself. Indeed, it is at this level, at which

(I) See below p. I25.

it has bearing on the possibility of coherent discursive thought, that, given the present context of solipsism, the relevance of the private language lies. For we must always remember that we must, ex hypothesi, take all the solipsist's views as simply occuring to him, or indeed ourselves, in thought. The argument, then, would have denied to our individual the possibility of any coherent thought, no matter how primitive its form, and this seems a much more implausible claim. However, I do not want to press this point here. The principal reason I have for introducing this discussion of the desert island case is that a possible response to it leads us into an issue on which we have already touched but which is such a general source of confusion that it deserves some further discussion. I have in mind here the issue of 'privacy in principle' and necessary and contingent privacy.

The sort of response I have in mind would involve challenging the assimilation of the case of the desert island dweller to the case of the S-game player. For, it might be said, while the material objects of which the desert island dweller is conscious are private they are not private 'in principle'. However, the objects of which the S-game player, i.e. sense-data, are private 'in principle' and it is against this sort of privacy that the private language argument is directed. The first thing to note here is that it is not at all clear what, precisely, the content of the expression 'private in principle' is. This is so despite its very common use(I). Generally it is, I think, assumed that by claiming that sense-data are 'private in principle' a person is simply asserting that sense-data are necessarily private. But we saw, in our earlier discussion, that the notion of necessary privacy is not adequate to any object of experience, whatever its precise nature. It seems that people who intend 'private in principle' in this way have simply failed to see

(I) See 2, p. 69.

that this is the case. If it is the case that the private language argument is directed against the notion that the objects of experience are necessarily private then there is very little evidence for this in Wittgenstein's text. Although it does seem clear from other passages that Wittgenstein was himself rightly suspicious of any notion that the objects of experience might be necessarily private. We need only note here his example of the Siamese twins who both feel the same pain at their join. If the objects of experience, whatever their precise nature, cannot be necessarily private then they must be contingently private. Consequently, both sense-data and material objects, if they are private objects at all, must be contingently private. If, then, the claim that sense-data are 'private in principle' is intended to mean that they are necessarily private it must be mistaken. We are still, then, without good reason for resisting the assimilation of the desert island dweller case to that of the S-game player. There is, however, just one other thought which may lie behind this talk of 'private in principle'. Once we uncover it, however, it will be seen that the expression 'in principle' is a rather peculiar one to use in the context. The thought here involves the observation that if say, a puff of steam is for me a private object of experience it is so simply because other people were looking away at the time etc. The considerations normally thought to provide grounds for the privacy of sense-data (and we earlier noted that they were far from convincing) are of a slightly different order and involved such things as an assumed one to one pairing of brains to minds. The claim, then, that some object is 'private in principle' just comes down to the claim that although that object is contingently private the precise contingencies which give rise to its privacy, e.g. mind/brain pairing, are different from the contingencies which

determine the privacy of objects which are not said to be 'private in principle', e.g. material objects. But then this is not really a matter of principle at all, just of contingent fact, and it is hard to see how much of philosophical importance can turn on it.

As we have just seen it seems that, if the private language argument succeeded, then, since it is simply directed against the notion that the objects of experience are private, it would not only establish that the objects of experience could not be sense-data but that no object of experience could be private, and this would include material objects. Or at least it would establish that such objects could not be the objects of language or coherent discursive thought. In all this we may well feel that the success of the private language argument would have established too much. And yet, in another way, it might well seem that it would not have established enough. For it might well seem that it would have failed to rule out that experience may be of public sensibilia. And, as we earlier noted, sensibilia seems hardly more conformable to common belief than sense-data. In other words, the private language argument would have failed to establish that experience was of material objects, although it is frequently thought that this would be a consequence of its success. The supposition that its success would result in such an establishment seems to arise from the mistaken notion that publicity is a defining characteristic of material objects, a notion which we have already examined. Undermine this notion and much of the interest which has been directed towards the private language argument and its vast associated literature must evaporate.

It is also worth noting that, if the private language argument had succeeded in showing that experience could not be of private objects, what we noted as our central concern, that of reconciling those plausible

views which seemed to lead to the sense-data thesis, and *via* it to solipsism, with the non-solipsistic views entrenched in common belief, is still untouched. For it would have been made clear that the sense-data thesis could not have been correct but precisely how and where our error was in developing that thesis would still remain a mystery.

Above I noted rather tentatively that the private language argument 'might well seem' to fail to rule out the possibility that experience might be of public sensibilia. And mention of sensibilia reminds us that in the course of our discussions our concerns have expanded. We began by noting only the sense-data thesis and how this seemed to lead to solipsism. But in trying to get clear about the notion of sense-data we noted at least the *prima facie* possibility of sensibilia. And now we must note that the notion of sensibilia brings its own difficulties. These concern questions such as, if experience was of sensibilia, could one ever know if any particular sensible was an object to some other subject? That is, does the sensibilia thesis imply its own form of epistemological solipsism? Again, if experience was of sensibilia, could one even have the notion of oneself as a personal subject to be distinguished from other such subjects? That is, does the sensibilia thesis imply its own form of metaphysical solipsism? These are difficult questions and I do not intend to embark on a discussion of them here. For, I believe, our energies would be better spent in a thorough examination of the arguments which are normally adduced in favour of the more general thesis that experience, whether it be of sense-data or sensibilia, is never of material objects as commonly thought. If we can show that there is no good ground for this conclusion then we can safely disregard the sensibilia thesis and its attendant difficulties.

It is only fair to note, however, before leaving the private language

argument that it is simply one part, though a central part, of the later Wittgenstein's treatment of the issue of privacy. Amongst the remaining material, perhaps the most relevant to us would seem to be Wittgenstein's claim in The Blue Book(I) that all the solipsist wants is a 'new notation'. However, by 'solipsist' here it would seem that Wittgenstein does not intend any of the standard solipsisms with which we have been concerned. For he writes 'the man whom we call a solipsist and who says that only his experiences are real, does not thereby disagree with us about any practical question of fact'. However, it seems clear that our solipsists do disagree with us about questions of fact. Rather what Wittgenstein seems to have in mind here, when he talks of a 'solipsist' who does not disagree with us about any practical question of fact, is his own position in the Tractatus where he writes 'the self of solipsism shrinks to a point without extension, and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it'(2). It is this blend of 'empirical realism and transcendental idealism', to borrow a Kantian phrase, where empirical reality, i.e. practical questions of fact, is not denied that seems to provide the target for Wittgenstein's remarks about the 'solipsist' simply requiring a new notation and not really disagreeing with us about any empirical matter. That is to say it is not really what we would recognize as a solipsist at all but rather a quite distinguishable, though related, Kantian or Schopenhauerian transcendental idealist.

(I) See 31, p. 57 and p. 59. (2) See 34, section 5.64.

Strawson's Persons

In his book Individuals Professor Strawson might seem to provide some good ammunition against the metaphysical solipsist. His principal concern in the chapter entitled 'Persons' is to argue that Cartesian dualism is a fundamental error and that the dualist could not even state his position, i.e. that he is essentially a mental substance to which are attributable states of consciousness and that he is distinct from his body to which are attributable material characteristics, if it were not the case that a person was an individual to which are attributable both states of consciousness and material characteristics. However, the grounds for Strawson's view with regard to persons include the claim that 'there would be no question of ascribing one's own states of conciousness, or experiences, to anything, unless one also ascribed, or were ready and able to ascribe, states of consciousness, or experiences, to other individual entities of the same logical type as that thing to which one ascribes one's own states of consciousness'(I). And this, of course, is a precise contradiction of the standard metaphysical solipsist's claim that there is 'only me and my objects of experience, beyond this lies nonsense'. Strawson would hold, then, that the standard metaphysical solipsist can only make his claim if he ascribes, or is ready and able to ascribe, consciousness to others and this is precisely what the solipsist claims would be nonsensical.

Here we have represented the metaphysical solipsist as denying any significance or sense to the claim that there may be other consciousnesses and that he alone was that thing of which consciousness could be significantly predicated. Indeed this is a natural way to interpret his position. However, if we recall carefully what we stated at the beginning was the position of the metaphysical solipsist it was

(I) See 26, p. I04.

simply that 'the world, in the only way in which I can attach any genuine sense to such a notion, is limited to me and the fleeting, private and mind-dependent sense-data of which I am conscious; beyond this lies nonsense'. There are, then, in the world of the metaphysical solipsist, a number of items, i.e. himself plus the objects, i.e. sense-data, of which he is conscious. (It may be that some metaphysical solipsists wrongly take the objects of experience simply to be states of themselves and so may conclude that there is really just one thing in the world, i.e. himself, albeit in a number of states. However, we have already seen that this view, that the objects of experience are simply states of the subject, runs into serious difficulty of a logical sort over the essential subject/object dualism of experience.) This observation suggests a rather desperate way in which the metaphysical solipsist might try to meet Strawson's claim regarding the conditions for the use of the predicate 'is conscious'. For might he not point out - again it must be remembered that expressions like 'point out', when used of the solipsist, may be taken, ex hypothesi, to mean something like 'think to himself' - that, since, in his world, there is a number of items, there is nothing to stop him accepting that there is also a range of identifiable particulars of which 'is conscious' is significantly predicable? He would have in mind here, presumably, himself and some of his objects of experience. For to remain a solipsist all he needs to claim is that while 'is conscious' may be significantly predicable of a range of particulars it is only truly predicable of one particular, that particular being himself. It might be thought that this move is not legitimate because 'is conscious' is not significantly predicable of the objects of consciousness, at least if they are sense-data. Although I would not want to be too dogmatic on it I am inclined to accept this point.

For it seems that it is a pure subject of which we want to predicate consciousness and this, as we have remarked, is not a possible empirical item at all but rather some point of a purely logical nature forced on us by the form of experience. Indeed, despite what Strawson says, it might seem generally that there is something strange about predicating consciousness of any empirical item. Try looking at one's body and saying of it 'This is conscious'. Whatever our view on this precise point, however, it does seem that the solipsist's move which led us to it is a rather strained attempt to meet the conditions which Strawson requires for the use of the predicate 'is conscious'. However, we have not yet touched on the grounds Strawson adduces in favour of acceptance of these conditions and this we must now do.

The conditions Strawson sets for the use of the predicate 'is conscious' rest on what he calls the 'purely logical point' that 'the idea of a predicate is correlative with that of a range of distinguishable individuals of which the predicate can be significantly, though not necessarily truly affirmed'. Professor Vesey remarks of this claim that it is 'by trying to think of a predicate which can be significantly affirmed of only one thing that one realizes the truth of what Strawson is saying. One cannot do it'(I). But plausible though this sounds it is hardly likely to convince the metaphysical solipsist for he may simply reply that we do not have to look very hard for such a predicate for the predicate 'is conscious', he being the only thing to which that predicate can be significantly applied, gives us an example straight away. Behind Strawson's claim here rather seems to lie his commitment to the theory of the asymmetry of subjects and predicates, an asymmetry which is supposed to reflect the fundamental type dualism of particulars and universals.

(I) See 28, p.4I.

Whether we share Strawson's committment to this type of dualism and its alleged reflection in the asymmetry of subjects and predicates - and those who are sympathetic to Ramsey's paper 'Universals'(I) may have their reservations on this point - it does seem that there is something seriously wrong with the metaphysical solipsist's claim that beyond talk and thought of himself and his own private objects of experience lies only nonsense. For the notion of a self or a subject, and by this, of course, I mean, a personal self or subject, would seem to be correlative with the notion of others. Frequently an error is made here and it is thought that the concept of a personal subject is correlative, not with the concept of other subjects but with the concept of objects of experience. However, the concept of objects of experience, pure and simple, is correlative with the concept of an impersonal or undifferentiated subject. We are reminded here of the Kantian transcendental self and even more of the Absolute of post-Kantian idealism. One could logically have the concept of objects of experience without having the concept of a personal subject but only the concept of an impersonal subject. Indeed this would be a state where a subject did not recognize itself as a personal subject and consequently as something qualifying for the descriptions 'alone' or 'not alone' etc. That is, solipsism would not be an issue for such a subject. It only becomes an issue for an individual who has the correlative concepts of personal self or subject and others. And this takes us back to our main point, for if the notion of others is nonsensical, and this is what our metaphysical solipsist is claiming, then so too must be its correlative notion of self, a notion of which the metaphysical solipsist makes conspicuous use. This, it must be stressed, is <u>not</u> Strawson's point with regard to the alleged correlation between a predicate and a range

(I) See 20, p. II2.

of distinguishable individuals.

Before concluding our brief discussion of Strawson we should note that the epistemological solipsist does not seem to fall foul of Strawson's conditions for the use of predicates. Epistemological solipsism was, we remember, the view that 'for all we know we might be alone'. This form of solipsism does, however, allow for the possibility of the significant predication of 'is conscious' to others and only claims that, as things stand, the objects of consciousness being what they are, i.e. sense-data, we have not any evidence on which to justify an ascription of consciousness to anything but ourselves. This point is blurred by Strawson for he seems to try to get, from his premiss, the stronger conclusion that one actually should reckon others as subjects of the predicate 'is conscious' as a condition of reckoning oneself such a subject. For Strawson follows the assertion that 'there would be no question of ascribing one's own states of consciousness, or experiences, to anything, unless one also ascribed, or were ready and able to ascribe(I), states of consciousness, or experiences, to other individual entities of the same logical type as that thing to which one ascribes one's own states of consciousness' with the claim that 'the condition of reckoning oneself as a subject of such predicates is that one should also reckon others(I) as such subjects of predicates'(2). Now, clearly, this subsequent claim does not follow from the initial one since, as we have seen, one might be ready and able to ascribe states of consciousness to others without, in fact, doing so. If we translate Strawson's argument into terms which carry less suggestion of explicit linguistic performance, and this, it would seem, we are entitled to do in a discussion of solipsism where we have to regard, ex hypothesi, all the solipsist's views as simply occuring to him in thought, his initial

(I) My italics. (2) See 26, p. I04.

claim seems to be as follows. There would be no question of conceiving oneself as a subject of experience unless one were at least ready and able to conceive other such subjects. But, of course, being ready and able to conceive other such subjects of experience is not actually conceiving others as such subjects. Being ready and able to conceive others as such subjects might simply amount to possessing the relevant concepts of self and others and being prepared to believe one's concept of others instantiated under certain conditions. But being prepared to believe one's concept of others instantiated is not believing it instantiated.

We can conclude, then, that while we may have doubts regarding how successfully Strawson's views undermine those of the metaphysical solipsist there certainly does seem to be something incoherent in the position of the metaphysical solipsist. However, Strawson's views regarding the correlative nature of subjects and predicates and the conditions for the ascription of predicates, even if correct, do not seem to rule out epistemological solipsism. One last, more general point remains. In so far as Strawson's views are relevant to metaphysical solipsism they are directed to showing that it, and indeed Cartesian dualism, is an incoherent doctrine and that its very statement requires its falsity. This being so we can again note that our real concern in this dissertation is untouched. For we have already noted that what must interest us here primarily is not that some quite implausible view is incoherent into the bargain but where and how, precisely, starting from what were all initially plausible enough views, we have gone wrong.

At the outset, when considering our strategy, we remarked that if a satisfactory reconciliation of the sense-data thesis and common belief could not be effected we might be wise to start with a thorough

examination of the sense-data thesis and the reasons adduced in its favour. However, while we have seen that the reasons adduced specifically in favour of the sense-data thesis are less than immediately convincing our concern has extended beyond the sense-data thesis to include the issue of sensibilia. With this in mind it is time for us to turn to the grounds normally adduced in favour of the more general thesis that the objects of experience are never material objects, whether they be sense-data or sensibilia. We can call this more general thesis the 'sense-datum thesis' to distinguish it from what we have called the 'sense-data thesis', i.e. the more specific thesis. If our sole concern had been with truth then perhaps we should have begun with a thorough examination of the arguments adduced in favour of the sense-datum thesis. For it is with these that the challenge to common belief originates. However, for the purposes of this dissertation it seemed advisable to show first, by way of a little background scenery, the sort of terrain into which the sense-data thesis leads. Now, however, it is time to adopt Austin's advice, given with regard to the sense-data thesis, and to stop 'trying to patch it up a bit and make it work properly', as the representative realists and phenomenalists try to do. But 'to go back to a much earlier stage, and to dismantle the whole doctrine before it gets off the ground'(I). In doing this we shall try to discover precisely where and how our errors have been made. Our treatment, however, will not be that of Austin.

(I) See I, p. I42.

PART III WHY NOT MATERIAL OBJECTS?

CHAPTER 5 KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

Descartes

Before we begin our discussion of Descartes we must enter a small caveat. Our discussion has, and will continue to be limited, almost entirely, to a treatment of the issues in terms of the sense of sight. We shall, then, be discussing the claim that we are never visually aware of material objects or the surfaces of material objects but rather of things of the sense-datum type. However, this need not be the handicap that might first be thought. There are two main reasons for this. First, it seems that the arguments adduced in favour of the view that we are not visually aware or do not have visual experience of material objects run as close parallels to similar arguments adduced in connection with other senses. It seems likely then that if we can undermine these arguments presented in terms of sight we could, mutatis mutandis, effect similar treatments of the parallel arguments given for other senses. Even if this were not possible, however, it would not matter much. For a principal concern of ours has been solipsism and the way it arose out of the notion that the objects of experience were never those material objects which we would commonly suppose. If we can, then, for just one sense, i.e. sight, show that this notion regarding the objects of experience has no proper foundation then we can conclude that we have, for one sense at least, access to the public, non-solipsistic world of common belief. Given this, even if it were agreed that the objects of other senses were of the sense-datum type we could still, on the basis of correlations of these sense-datum objects with sight, have grounds for legitimate inference to public events which were somehow correlated to the events of the sense-datum type.

It is commonly thought that Descartes' celebrated sceptical arguments from illusion, dreaming and the possibility of a malignant demon lead, in a fairly straightforward way, to the conclusion that experience is never of material objects. However, the immediate point of these arguments is to establish that there are grounds for doubting all our ordinary beliefs about external material objects. For Descartes begins his First Meditation with the statement that 'Several years have now elapsed since I first became aware that I had accepted, even from my youth, many false opinions(I) for true.. and from that time I was convinced of the necessity of undertaking once in my life to rid myself of all the opinions(I) I had adopted'(2). And a little later he writes that it will not 'be necessary even to deal with each belief individually, which would be a truly endless labour; but, as the removal from below of the foundations necessarily involves the downfall of the whole edifice, I will at once approach the criticism of the principles on which all my former beliefs rested'. Thus, in the argument from illusion Descartes concludes by observing of the senses that they have sometimes misled him and that 'it is the part of prudence not to place absolute confidence in that by which we have even once been deceived'. The point here would seem to be that Descartes will refrain from placing any confidence in those beliefs based on or prompted by the data of the senses. In his argument from dreaming Descartes claims 'that there exist no certain marks by which the state of waking can ever be distinguished from sleep'. The point again seems to be that there are grounds for doubting my present belief that I am surrounded by a number of particular material objects etc. and I may really just be asleep and dreaming. Similarly, in the argument from the malignant demon, where Descartes supposes that such a demon has

(I) My italics. (2) See 9, p. 79.

set about deceiving him in every possible way, it is against his beliefs that the sceptical argument is directed. Clearly, however, it is one thing to establish that we can never know with certainty if external material objects exist and are experienced by us etc. and quite another to establish that our experience is not of material objects. Descartes' arguments from illusion, dreaming and the malignant demon, if they succeed, establish a conclusion with regard to the limits of our knowledge but this conclusion holds no implication for the nature of the objects of experience. If, then, the arguments work at all they simply lead to a sort of epistemological solipsism where the only things which I can know with certainty are that I exist and that it seems to me as if such and such is the case. But, clearly, it does not follow from the fact that I can be certain only of the fact that it seems to me as if I am seeing the table that I am not seeing the table but only some sort of sense-datum. This is a crucial point for it concerns a confusion of knowledge with experience or, more precisely, the limits of knowledge with the nature of the objects of experience, which has vitiated many discussions of our topic. This confusion involves a fallacy which is seldom, if ever, stated explicitly but seems to lie behind many misunderstandings. The fallacy, baldly stated, runs 'If we cannot know if experience is of material objects then it cannot be of material objects'. We see this sort of fallacy most conspicuously at work where Descartes, having to his own satisfaction established grounds for doubt regarding the material world, supposes it not to exist and concludes from this that he is essentially a mental thing without even a body. It is only on this basis that Descartes goes on to mount his theory of non-material ideas being the actual objects of experience. But, of course, it is not a valid inference from the premiss that one

cannot be sure that material objects exist and the premiss that one is sure that one exists somehow as a conscious being to the conclusion that one exists as a purely non-material thing and that the objects of consciousness are non-material ideas.

We can conclude then that even if Descartes' arguments from illusion, dreaming and the malignant demon do achieve their aim, to provide valid grounds for doubt regarding the whole material world, and it is not at all clear that they do, then this would not prove that the material world did not exist or that I was essentially a mental thing or that I was not aware of material objects. The fatal flaw in Descartes' sceptical method is to move straightaway from doubt to the supposition that the object of doubt does not exist. This is no more reasonable than the reverse tendency to assume that everything which one cannot prove not to exist does exist.

We should just note that Professor Williams(I), with specific reference to the real distinction between mind and body, defends Descartes against this charge of fallacy which both Professor Geach and Dr Kenny(2) direct at him. Williams' point seems to be that Descartes does not derive his real distinction straightaway from doubt concerning the material world, but that he is simply, at this stage, concerned to establish the clear conceivability of himself as a purely non-material thing. It is only later, by means of God's benevolence, that Descartes is guaranteed a real distinction corresponding to the purely conceptual one with which he is here concerned. Certainly, there are grounds for thinking that Descartes, in response to objections by Arnauld, modified his position in this direction. However, as we have already noted in our discussion of representative realism, there are serious objections both to Descartes' arguments for such a God and the notion that such a God

(I) See 29, p. II2. (2) See II, p. 8 and I6, p. 86.

could perform the tasks which Descartes required of him.

Now, we have been concerned to make it clear that the immediate aim of the arguments from illusion, dreaming and the malignant demon is not to establish that we are never aware of material objects but the rather different conclusion that we cannot know with certainty that we do experience material objects. However, it might be thought, this second conclusion and its solipsistic epistemological implications are quite bad enough. For would we really be satisfied only with establishing the rather negative sort of conclusion that it has not been proved that experience is not of material objects? Don't we want to be free to say too that we know that experience is frequently of material objects? We shall, then, before examining arguments whose direct aim is to establish that experience cannot be of material objects, pause to discuss Descartes' sceptical arguments from illusion, dreaming and the malignant demon in slightly more detail.

We shall begin with the argument from illusion. Descartes writes that all he has accepted as 'possessed of the highest truth and certainty, (he) received either from or through the senses'. He goes on 'I observed, however, that these sometimes misled us; and it is the part of prudence not to place absolute confidence in that by which we have even once been deceived'(I). Descartes' expression here is rather elliptical and opinions vary with regard to what, precisely, he is aiming to establish. It has been suggested that he merely wants to establish that sensory evidence alone is not sufficient to distinguish true from false belief. If this is the case then we can agree with Descartes, for sensory evidence is, by its nature, incapable of making such a distinction. However, there are good grounds for concluding that the point of Descartes' argument is indeed to establish that no belief based on sensory evidence

(I) See 9, p. 80.

is to be relied on with confidence.

Now, it has been objected that the argument is self-refuting for in order to say with confidence that some beliefs based on sensory evidence have been mistaken it is necessary to say with confidence that other similar beliefs are true. For it is only against beliefs regarded as true that one can judge others false and mistaken. Consequently, it is held that Descartes' conclusion, that one must not have any confidence in any beliefs based on sensory evidence, undermines his own argument which requires that one regards with confidence at least some such beliefs.

Dr Kenny, in his book Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy, defends Descartes against this sort of objection. Kenny writes that there are cases where 'a deceptive sense perception of an object is corrected not by any further sense perception of that object but by intellectual means alone'(I). Presumably Kenny means here that certain false beliefs based on sensory evidence come to be regarded as false not in virtue of the fact that they conflict with other similarly based beliefs (we can admit that further observations of the particular object in question may not be necessary) but simply because by 'intellectual means alone' they can be shown to be false. In support of this Kenny writes that 'it is not by taking a closer look at the sun, but by understanding the reasoning of astronomers that I come to realize that the sun is larger than it looks'. Presumably here, Kenny has in mind the tendency for people to judge, for example, that the sun is about the same size as the moon. If not then we must note a certain strangeness about talk of the sun as being larger than it looks. What would it be to see the sun the correct size? When do we see tables and chairs the correct size? Kenny's argument, however, seems to me quite mistaken. Certainly it is true to

(I) See I6, p. 26.

say that many of us, as individuals, would never have thought the sun to be many, many times larger than the moon had we not read so in the authoritative texts of the astronomers. On such an obvious fact rests the plausibility of Kenny's argument. However, it is far from clear that what we have here is a case where we have come to revise a mistaken judgement by 'intellectual means alone'. For the astronomer's researches are clearly not a priori intellectual exercises but are conspicuously heavily dependent on repeated observations. Further, it is not clear that we would be convinced by the reasoning of the astronomers, or even find it intelligible, if we had not, from our own countless experiences, become familiar with the phenomena of apparent relative size varying with distance.

An illustration might make this clear. Let us imagine a member of an isolated tribe which inhabits a land permanently overcast by a dense layer of cloud. None of the tribe has ever seen the moon or the sun. The tribe is, however, remarkably sophisticated in mathematics, particularly geometry and trigonometry. On one epoch making day a small opening appears in the cloud and allows our tribe member a glimpse of the sun and the moon which happen, through some astronomical contingency, to be simultateously visible. The question then is, by what purely intellectual means could our tribesman discover that the sun is much larger than the moon. It seems to me none and that Kenny's argument involves the claim that a matter of empirical fact can be established by a process of a priori reasoning, i.e. purely intellectual means. For if beliefs based on first impressions are wrong what else has one to go on but a priori reasoning if one is denied access to any other observations. Descartes, himself, may well have endorsed the claim regarding a priori reasoning but it is not one which strikes many today

as at all plausible. Of course, none of this is to say that intellectual activity is not an absolutely essential part of making any sort of judgement about the size of the moon or about anything else for that matter. It is only to maintain the point that intellectual activity alone is insufficient and that, consequently, we must, at some point, put our trust in the senses in making any such judgement.

Our original objection to Descartes' argument seems, then, to stand. However, it has been pointed out that to establish the non-trustworthy nature of beliefs based on sensory evidence it is not necessary to show any particular belief false by reference to another belief considered true. All that is required is that it should be shown that beliefs based on sensory evidence can be inconsistent. If such beliefs are inconsistent then one can claim that they cannot both be correct without having to place confidence in either one of them. I think, however, that this argument too may well be mistaken. Let us take Descartes' example of the tower. Suppose we are out walking some distance from a tower and we judge, on the basis of what we see, that the tower is round. A little later we judge, again on the basis of what we see, that the tower is square. Now, these judgements alone do not form a contradiction. For things, like Descartes' wax, can change shape. There is, then, nothing inconsistent about judging something to be round one moment and square a few moments later. We only get a contradiction if we supplement these two judgements with a third such as 'the tower is a rigid structure and has not changed its shape'. So even to get a contradiction of the sort envisaged it seems we must place our trust in some belief of the sort based on sensory evidence. The sensory evidence here in question being that on which one judges towers to be rigid inflexible structures, i.e. a rich complex of past experience in

which one has put one's trust.

Ayer agrees that 'no judgements of perception would be specially open to distrust unless some were trustworthy'. However, he continues by claiming that 'this is not a proof that we cannot be mistaken in trusting those that we do'. He concludes that 'we have to make good our claim to know that some particular ones are not (delusive)'(I). Here we can note that in accepting that we require a proof that we cannot be mistaken in trusting the judgements that we do Ayer plays into the hands of the sceptic. We shall shortly suggest that the onus is not on the non-sceptic to provide a proof of his most fundamental beliefs and trusted judgements ad infinitum or until some indubitable Cartesian belief is revealed but rather on the sceptic to provide genuine and coherent grounds for doubting those beliefs and judgements. This, we shall suggest, is something which the sceptic conspicuously fails to do. The image we must discard when considering knowledge is Descartes' own one of a building on secure foundations which themselves have even more secure foundations and so on ad infinitum or until some indubitable beliefs are found. Hume was correct when he observed that reasons come to an end somewhere and not in sets of indubitable beliefs. The appropriate image here is rather Neurath's boat, i.e. an internally complex, coherent and highly ramified structure yet one which is, for all that, free floating on the sea of experience. The major requirement being that our boat is sea worthy, i.e. that it is, in some sense, adequate to experience.

We now come to the argument from dreaming. Descartes writes 'that there exist no certain marks by which the state of waking can ever be distinguished from sleep'. The point here seems to be that in the absence of such distinguishing marks I may only be dreaming that there

(I) See 4, p. 38.

is a table before me and, in reality, be asleep in bed. Again this argument has prompted much discussion. J L Austin questioned whether it could be 'seriously suggested that having the dream (that one is being presented to the Pope) is "qualitatively indistinguishable" from actually being presented to the Pope?' and answers 'Quite obviously not'(I). However, Descartes seems to have a quite adequate response to this sort of objection. He writes 'I extend this hand consciously and with express purpose, and I perceive it: the occurrences in sleep are not so distinct as all this. But I cannot forget that at other times, I have been deceived in sleep by similar illusions'. The point here seems to be that whatever one takes to be the distinguishing mark of a waking state, whether it be clarity or continuity with 'remembered' events or whatever, one can always dream that it is a feature of the dreamt experience.

Norman Malcolm's objection to Descartes' argument involves an attempt to show that a question like 'How can I tell whether I am awake or dreaming?' is senseless. Malcolm claims that such a question is 'quite senseless since it implies that it is possible to judge that one is dreaming and this judgement is as unintelligible as the judgement that one is asleep'(2). However, there is something unconvincing about this approach for it is not obvious that one cannot judge oneself to be dreaming. Much discussion of this topic suffers from the rather simplistic assumption that there is a quite firm line to be drawn between sleeping and waking states. I suggest that most people's experience would confirm that there is, rather, a continuous range of intermediate states of varying degrees of drowsiness. It is not clear that in some such intermediate state one might not dream and, at the same time, judge oneself to be dreaming. I must emphasize that what I mean here is not

(I) See I, p. 48. (2) See I7, p. I09.

that one dreams oneself to judge that one is dreaming but that one does actually judge. This just as one can judge oneself to be day-dreaming. In support of this sort of view we can note the plausible claims of people to be able to wake themselves up out of a dream. It is then not obvious that 'How can I tell whether I am awake or dreaming?' is senseless for the reason Malcolm gives.

We now come to a way with Descartes' argument which involves showing the supposition that one may simply be dreaming to be self-refuting. One thing does seem fairly clear and that is that simply to dream that one is doing something is not to do that thing. It may be this point which confusedly lies behind Malcolm's approach. Consequently, it is a condition of doubting that one may be dreaming that one is not simply dreaming that one is doubting that one may be dreaming. Consequently, it is a condition of doubting that one may be dreaming that one is not dreaming it. The Cartesian doubt here then is self-refuting since it is a condition of doubting anything that one is awake and not simply dreaming that one is doubting and awake. But the sceptic may say that surely the fact that one can dream that one is doubting does give us grounds for doubting that we may be dreaming. But this is not so because one cannot doubt <u>if</u> one is merely dreaming.

Let us now turn to Descartes' malignant demon argument. Descartes writes 'I will suppose.. that some malignant demon, who is at once exceedingly potent and deceitful, has employed all his artifice to deceive me; I will suppose that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, figures, sounds and all external things, are nothing better than the illusions of dreams'(I). Although, at this particular point, Descartes just mentions 'all external things' as subject to doubt a little earlier in the Meditation he writes 'as I sometimes think that others are in

(I) See 9, p. 84.

error respecting matters of which they believe themselves to possess a perfect knowledge, how do I know that I am not also deceived each time I add together two and three, or number the sides of a square, or form some judgement still more simple, if more simple indeed can be imagined?'. It seems, then, that Descartes is prepared, not just to suppose that his beliefs concerning the external world are mistaken but also that his beliefs concerning simple mathematical and logical truths may be similarly mistaken. What he seems to have in mind here, then, is a very comprehensive scepticism indeed.

What we first need to note is that the demon himself is little more than a rather fanciful dramatic device. The substantial philosophical points which Descartes seems to be making are, first, that it is possible, even in the simplest, most fundamental, beliefs, to be mistaken and, second, that this possibility of error justifies serious doubts concerning the beliefs in question. Let us take the issue of the possibility of error first.

Many philosophers, including, of course, Descartes himself, have held that there are some beliefs about which it is impossible to be mistaken. In Descartes' case the belief was the belief that he himself existed, albeit as a purely thinking thing. Generally the hope has been that a whole system of knowledge can be built up on the basis of such allegedly incorrigible beliefs. Now we need not argue here if there are indeed such beliefs. It may be that there are a few although we have already seen reason to be suspicious of Goodman's observers decrees and we shall, I think, have cause to be equally suspicious of Ayer's experiential propositions. The fact remains, however, that philosophers in general have been notoriously unsuccessful in effecting the connections between the allegedly incorrigible beliefs and the host of

ordinary beliefs for which those of an incorrigible nature were supposed to form the basis.

Let us then allow that in at least the vast majority of our beliefs it is possible that we are mistaken. We must now ask if this possibility is sufficient grounds for genuine doubt concerning the beliefs in question. For example, is the fact that it is just possible that I am mistaken in thinking that the pieces of paper on front of me have writing on them grounds for actually doubting that they have writing on them? And here I am inclined to think that the answer is no. For before I actually start to doubt such a thing what I seem to need is some reason to doubt and the mere possibility of error is not such a reason. For example, if I were reminded that only recently I had taken some hallucinogenic drug then I might be led seriously to doubt if there was writing on the paper or even paper here at all. In the absence of such a reason, however, I need not doubt any such thing.

However, the sceptic may say that he can give us a reason for doubt, albeit not one of the specific sort we have just indicated. For he may claim, and we might well agree with him, that reasons for belief generally come to an end somewhere and only infrequently, if ever, in the incorrigible propositions of philosophers like Descartes. The sceptic may then point out that, at a sufficiently fundamental level, while he may not be able to give specific reasons for doubt neither can the non-sceptic give reasons for belief. This being so, each side is just as reasonable or unreasonable as the other. Consequently, it would be quite arbitrary and unreasonable to plump for belief as opposed to doubt. That is, the very lack of reasons either way is a reason for some doubt. However, the non-sceptic has an answer to this. It involves showing that the profound and comprehensive sort of doubt that the sceptic wants

to press on us is ultimately incoherent and self-refuting. For the sceptic, in doubting, tacitly presupposes the very sorts of belief which he explicitly makes a great show of doubting. For example, the doubt that three plus two may not equal five presupposes that I know what 'three', 'two', 'five', 'plus' and 'equals' mean. But is not this knowledge simply contained in such formulae as 'three plus two equals five'? If the sceptic claims to doubt this then he must also doubt what 'three' or 'two' or 'plus' etc. mean. But if he does this then it is not at all clear what he is doubting when he claims to doubt if three plus two equals five. One must, at least, be certain of what it is that one is doubting. The assertion that one is doubting but is not really sure what it is that one is doubting, i.e. that one doubts what one doubts, has a very peculiar ring to it indeed. And yet this is the sort of position into which one is forced by the profound and comprehensive 'doubt' of the sceptic. If we adopt this sort of response to the sceptic then we seem to be in line with a recent trend in philosophy. Strawson in Individuals writes 'So with many sceptical problems their statement involves the pretended acceptance of a conceptual scheme and at the same time the silent repudiation of one of the conditions of its existence'(I). And in On Certainty Wittgenstein wrote 'If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty'(2).

(I) See 26, p. I06. (2) See 32, section II5.

Ayer

Perhaps the most celebrated recent advocate of the sense-datum theory has been A J Ayer. However, even a very brief discussion of Ayer's support for the sense-datum theory would be incomplete without some mention of J L Austin's treatment of Ayer in Sense and Sensibilia. We shall therefore start with Austin before moving on to Ayer's more recent work on the topic.

Austin's approach is characterized by a quite unparalleled sensitivity to and regard for ordinary current English usage. In Sense and Sensibilia Austin also adopted a typically piecemeal approach which makes his treatment impossible to discuss thoroughly in a short space. However, one or two general observations might be made. Austin's treatment at least revealed that the philosophers who had advanced the sense-datum theory were, in their expression, relatively careless and clumsy. Consequently, if it came to be thought that these philosophers traded on the misuse of terms such as 'illusion' and 'real' etc. then they really only had themselves to blame. However, despite the great interest of what Austin has to say about the richness and complexity of ordinary English, we might wonder if he always, or even most of the time, scores really palpable hits against the substance of Ayer's position rather than against what Ayer has often since admitted to be highly infelicitous expression. Indeed this is Ayer's own view and in his paper 'Has Austin Refuted the Sense-Datum Theory?' he takes a number of his key terms which Austin subjects to scrutiny and argues that while much of what Austin says is both true and interesting it is really beside the point. For example, Austin took exception to the use Ayer had made of the term 'real' and noted a variety of ways in which we ordinarily use the word, e.g. to distinguish real and cultured pearls

or real and decoy ducks etc. Ayer's response is to note that we do 'also contrast what is real with what is only apparent, as in the example "the penny looks elliptical from this angle but it is really round" and that we do contrast what is real with what is illusory as in the example of the drunkard's seeing pink rats which are not really there. The sense-datum theorist concentrates on these distinctions because they are the ones that are relevant to his argument. The fact that he does not deal with distinctions which are not relevant is not a reproach to him.'

Again we can note how, at the outset, Austin claims that the dichotomy between sense-data and material objects is a bogus one and that when we think of things like people's voices, rivers, mountains, flames, rainbows and shadows etc. we should see that it is a 'typical philosopher's over-simplification'. Ayer admits that Austin has a point here but says that he hopes to show 'that the tendency of the sense-datum theorist to rely on a limited set of stock examples (i.e. moderate sized specimens of dry goods) has not made any serious difference to the validity of their arguments'. However, it is not at all clear that Ayer should even go this far with Austin. For while all the members of Austin's list may not, in ordinary English, be happily subsumed under the term 'material object' this is hardly the point. For the sense-datum theorist seems to be saying the same thing about them all, i.e. that we never experience them at all, as commonly thought, but only their representatives or, in the case of the phenomenalist, that they are not the sort of objects which we commonly suppose them to be but classes of a quite different sort of object.

There remains one other general sort of point which we may make here concerning Austin's general approach. Austin, more than any other

philosopher, has made us aware of the immense richness of ordinary English. Yet we might think, with justice, that this richness was not always there but evolved over the ages as people found it useful to coin new expressions in an attempt to make the language increasingly articulate. It is a little ironic then that it should be Austin, who by constant appeal to current ordinary usage, would seem to tend to inhibit this evolution. For Austin's essential technique seems to be to stipulate, on the basis of current English, the definitions of some of the sense-datum theorist's key terms. It is suggested that this is how the terms 'appear', 'real', 'look', 'illusion', etc. are ordinarily used, i.e. not in the way that the sense-datum theorist wishes to use them, and that consequently the sense-datum theorist's use is a misuse. There are some grounds here for the fear that such a doctrinaire reliance on ordinary current usage might lead to the petrification of language and thought. The way must be left open for people in general, not just the sense-datum theorist, to coin new uses which seem appropriate to their experiences.

Before concluding our discussion of Austin we must note with Ayer that one major deficiency in Sense and Sensibilia is the absence of any treatment at all of the so-called 'argument from causality' which is frequently adduced in favour of the view that the objects of experience are not material objects.

In his book The Central Questions of Philosophy Ayer restates the 'argument from illusion' in a way which takes some cognisance of Austin's remarks. In what Ayer admits is 'not altogether happily' named 'the argument from illusion' Ayer claims to distinguish four quite distinct sorts of premiss. The first concerns the fact of misidentification, the second concerns total hallucinations, the third

concerns ordinary perspectival variations and light effects etc. and the fourth 'the more general point that the way things appear to us is never just a consequence of their own nature' but 'is causally dependent also on the environment, on such factors as the state of the light, and on our own mental and physical condition'.

Let us begin with the issue of misidentification. Ayer has in mind here cases of Eskimoes who, while watching a film of seals, mistook the images on the screen for real seals and cases where 'a figure in a wax museum is mistaken for a real person or vice versa'.(I) The first question which immediately arises here concerns why it should be thought that because I misidentify one material object like a waxwork for another like a real person then I do not experience a material object at all. In discussing this question we shall be returning again to a recurring theme of this dissertation, the distinction between knowledge and experience. At the outset we were concerned to establish that there was some fundamental distinction to be drawn between the objects of experience, the given, and the concepts and judgements etc. which we applied to them. Later we noted that in Hirst's claim that there was more to perception than just sensing, or experiencing the given, Hirst seemed to have discerned this distinction but for no good reason seemed to assume that it was an insight available only to the critical realist and denied to the direct and representative realists. In this connection we noted that the term 'perception' seems to imply at least some element of judgement, i.e. perception is not simply raw experience of the given. More recently still we noted Descartes' fallacious move from the claim regarding knowledge that we cannot know that experience is of material objects to the conclusion regarding experience that experience is not of material objects.

(I) See 2, p. 73.

Now we shall see that Ayer's discussion is also vitiated by this confusion between knowledge and experience. For behind Ayer's position seems to lie the thought that because we cannot have immediate knowledge of a material object we cannot experience, or in the sense-datum theorist's terminology 'immediately experience', such an object. We find evidence for this when we examine his treatment of the direct realist or, as Ayer calls him, the 'naive realist'. The direct realist, as we understand him, is simply claiming that, as commonly believed, large tracts of our experience comprise experience of material objects or, at least, the surfaces of material objects. But he does not wish to deny that mistakes with regard to the correct identification of these material objects are impossible. He is quite prepared to admit that one might mistake a lifelike waxwork for a real person, a bush for a horse, a hallucinatory dagger, which he would not deny is ostensibly at least a non-material object, for a real one and even a real dagger for a hallucinatory one. However, like Hirst, Ayer fails to note that the direct realist is simply making a claim with regard to experience and assumes that he is making a claim with regard to knowledge as well. For on pages 80 and 81 of Central Questions Ayer rightly notes a number of ways in which a statement like 'This is a table' goes beyond the actual given which prompted its utterance. He has in mind here both general beliefs regarding such material objects, e.g. that they occupy three-dimensional space, have some permanence etc., and more precise beliefs regarding the table, e.g. that if we place something on it it will not turn out to be made of rubber and collapse etc. He then asks rhetorically 'But now can it be seriously maintained that all this falls within the content of a single act of perception? Can my present view of the table, considered purely in itself as a fleeting visual experience,

conceivably guarantee that I am seeing something that is also tangible, or visible to other observers?'. The clear suggestion here is that this is precisely what the direct realist is claiming. But as we have already noted the direct realist is not committed in any way to denying that in making knowledge claims such as 'This is a table' we do make a great many inferences of the sort Ayer enumerates. Ayer is wrong then to conclude that 'the naive realists are wrong in so far as they deny that our ordinary judgements of perception are susceptible of analysis, or deny that they embody inferences which can be made explicit'. For the direct realist, as we present him, it is a cardinal point that perception is analysable into the given and rational procedures such as conceptualization, inference, etc. made with regard to that given. If the direct realist denies that perception involves some sort of inference it is not the sort which Ayer here enumerates but the alleged inference from sense-data to distinct material objects lying beyond and in some way represented by sense-data. It is because Ayer is confused between knowledge and experience that he assumes that the direct realist's claim that we are aware of material objects commits the direct realist to the claim that 'my present view of this table, considered purely in itself as a fleeting visual experience' by itself guarantees an immense number of knowledge claims which are implied by 'This is a table'. It was the same confusion which made Hirst claim that on a direct realist view error becomes inexplicable.

Now the question occurs to us 'Is there nothing then between the direct realist and Ayer but Ayer's misunderstanding of the direct realist's position?'. For Ayer is no representative realist and the inferences which the direct realist took exception to were those made by the representative realist and indeed the direct realist seems more than

ready to agree with Ayer that ordinary knowledge claims involve a host of inferences with regard to future experience etc. Unhappily, this is not so for it turns out that Ayer's confusion of knowledge with experience has not only vitiated his portrayal of the direct realist but his own position as well. For in the chapter entitled 'Construction of the Physical World' Ayer begins by reminding us that our ordinary judgements of perception 'claim more than is strictly vouchsafed by the experiences which give rise to them'. So far, so good. He then claims that 'it ought to be possible to devise propositions which simply record the contents of those experiences, without carrying any further implications'. We might first wonder if this is possible. For any proposition at all would seem to carry implications which Ayer wishes to exclude. Even if we take something like 'red now' it would seem that such a judgement purports to record some similarity to certain previous experiences and so even such a vague utterance as this would seem to go beyond the content of the present experience. Presumably, Ayer here would argue, in accord with Goodman, that the observer's decree settles the truth of 'red now' without recourse to other experiences. That is to say that calling a thing 'red' here makes it red. However, we have already seen, in connection with our discussion of the private language argument, reason to be suspicious of the theory that things like this are settled by the decree of the observer. However, all this is slightly incidental for our main concern here is with Ayer's next move. This is simply to assert that 'it is possible to hold that my visual field at any given moment consists of <u>nothing more</u>(I) than an array of colours'. It is now, with talk of our visual fields as consisting of <u>nothing more</u> than an array of colours, that Ayer suddenly lurches away from the direct realist. And, again, behind this move seems to be the

(I) My italics.

confusion of knowledge with experience and the fallacious inferences of the sort which we have already noted in connection with Descartes. For what else would account for the move from the justified claim that ordinary judgements of perception 'claim more than is strictly vouchsafed by the experiences which give rise to them' to the unjustified claim that 'my visual field at any moment consists of nothing more than an array of colours' but some thought of the following sort? The claim 'This is a table' involves inferences but 'experiential propositions', so it is claimed, do not. Consequently, it must be the subjects of experiential propositions, and nothing more, which form the objects of experience. The thought here being that the object of experience can only be that of which we can be absolutely sure, i.e. something which involves no inference, and the only things of which we can be absolutely sure, in this way, are, so it is claimed, that there is red now etc. So it must be that the actual objects of experience are nothing more than just reds, blues, greens, etc.

Ayer makes the same move in slightly different terms in his paper on Austin. Again in an attempt to find some sort of incorrigible statement he suggests that it is 'possible to formulate a statement which does not go beyond the evidence, in the sense that it carries no implications about the status of what is seen'. Again we may wonder if this is possible but what we should note here is that Ayer says that such a statement would carry 'no implications about the status of what is seen'. For this must mean that 'red now' would not imply that the red could not be part of the surface of a table or other material object. Ayer goes on to say that a statement 'of this kind, which I propose to call an "Experiential Statement", will simply record the presence, say, of a visual pattern. It will leave it entirely open whether the observer

is right in treating the pattern as a manifestation(I) of the kind of physical object which he claims to perceive, or indeed of a physical entity of any sort at all'. We might here become suspicious of Ayer's use of the term 'manifestation' for it suggests that he is beginning to hedge away from his earlier declaration that experiential statements carry no implications with regard to the status of what is seen. For it is suggested that what is seen is, at best, a manifestation of the physical object which the observer claims to perceive, i.e. not a physical object itself. Indeed, we are correct to start being suspicious here for on page I4I Ayer claims 'that physical objects do not figure in experiential statements'. The clear suggestion here is that the subjects of experiential statements like 'red now' do not refer to physical objects but to data like patches of colour etc. But it is not at all clear that material objects could not figure in such statements. For example, let us suppose that there is before me a red table top and that I am aware of it. I claim 'This is a red table top'. Clearly this is not an experiential statement for it involves a number of inferences. Suppose then I substitute the claim 'red now' with a view to getting at least close to one of Ayer's experiential statements. It is not true to say, in such a case, that a material object does not figure in such a statement for the particular patch of colour referred to by the subject of the statement would be identical with the surface of a material object. As Frege made clear we can easily refer to things without knowing much about them. For example, one can refer to one and the same star by using either the expression 'evening star' or 'morning star' without knowing that both expressions refer to the same star. Similarly, in an experiential statement like 'red now' the reference of 'red' could be the surface of a table without the person who made the

(I) My italics. See 3, p. 287.

statement knowing this. This seems to be the point which Ayer has missed because again he confuses knowledge with experience and supposes with Descartes that one can only experience what one knows. That is that the objects of experience cannot be material objects unless one knows them to be material objects and that if all one knows of them is what is contained in an experiential statement then they cannot be anything more than that, i.e. data like patches of colour.

Ayer's second sort of fact on which he bases his claims regarding sense-data involve the fact of total hallucination. Ayer has here in mind the pink rats of the alcoholic etc. The first point which should strike us here is simply this. Why, because some experiences are, ostensibly at least, not of material objects, should we conclude that we never experience material objects?

Here Ayer seems to have two responses. In his paper on Austin he responds to a similar point made by Austin with an appeal to what he calls 'considerations of continuity'. He argues that if one is walking towards a distant object then 'it is implausible to maintain that one begins be seeing a series of sense-data, and then suddenly at the point where the object looks to be the size and shape it really is one starts directly seeing a physical object instead'. We might first wonder here, as we did in connection with Kenny's defence of Descartes, just precisely when something 'looks to be the size and shape it really is'. But this is a point to which we can return when we consider perspectival distortion etc. For what we need to note now is that these considerations of continuity are irrelevant to the particular matter in hand, i.e. the matter of total hallucination. For a conspicuous feature of such hallucinations as pink rats and Macbeth's dagger is their disturbing discontinuities with normal experience. However, to be fair

to Ayer, he does not put that much weight on this argument here. For he goes on to argue that whatever the force of these considerations all the sense-datum theorist needs to do is 'make good his initial step, that in any case in which anything of whatever kind is perceived, something is directly apprehended, or, as I prefer to put it, that every statement which claims perception of a physical object is founded on an experiential statement, and if he chooses to use the term "sense-data" to refer to the "objects" which figure in experiential statements, he will already have established the conclusion that every case of perception, whether veridical or delusive, involves the sensing of sense-data'. But we have already noted that this only establishes the sensing of sense-data where 'sense-data' is used inclusively, i.e. in Moore's sense, to refer to things which may well be the surfaces of material objects.

Ayer, however, has another sort of argument by which he attempts to establish that all experience is of sense-data from the mere fact of occasional total hallucination. This argument originally claimed that 'there is no intrinsic difference in kind between those of our perceptions that are veridical in their presentation of material things and those that are delusive'(I). This is a bit unclear but we shall take it that this is an assertion regarding the qualitative similarity of objects of experience in veridical and delusive perception and that because of this qualitative similarity the objects of normal experience are really of the same sort as the objects of experience in hallucinatory perceptions, i.e. not material objects. Austin, however, had challenged the original assertion and claimed that 'seeing pink rats in delirium tremens is not exactly like seeing pink rats'. Ayer accepts this point of Austin's but goes on to say that all he really wanted to claim was 'that appearances

(I) See 3, p. 298.

were in some way deceptive' and that 'from that consideration of the experience alone it was not possible to tell to which category it belonged'. The categories here in question are what Ayer now calls the 'veridical' and 'delusive'. Again we must take Ayer's claim to mean that we cannot tell from consideration of the objects of experience alone whether they are the objects in a veridical or hallucinatory perception. For objects of experience may not themselves be veridical or hallucinatory. 'Veridical' means truthful and, while it can be used to qualify 'perceptions' since we agreed that perceptions involved some judgemental aspect, it cannot, without begging a number of questions, be used to qualify the objects of experience. For the use of 'veridical' to qualify the objects of experience straightaway suggests that they are mere representations which can be regarded as giving a truthful or deceptive picture of some reality beyond etc. Certainly we can form veridical or non-veridical judgements on the basis of certain objects of experience but the objects themselves, we would hold, cannot be said to be truthful or not. But now it is far from clear why it should be thought to follow from the fact that we cannot tell from consideration of an object of experience alone whether it is part of a veridical or delusive perception, even if we accept this as true, that an object of experience in a veridical perception must be of the same sort as an object of experience in a delusive perception. The argument from the fact that we cannot tell any difference to the conclusion that there cannot be any difference is surely invalid. It is worth noting here also that it is never, or hardly ever, that we do come to the conclusion that a particular object is part of a delusive perception simply by consideration of that object alone but only in the light of a host of other objects, other sensory data.

Further, it is not at all clear what Ayer would regard as qualitatively distinguishable objects if he regards the objects in veridical and hallucinatory perception as qualitatively indistinguishable. I certainly cannot conceive what sort of thing he can have in mind here which might, on the experiencing of it, prompt us to say 'Ah! This is qualitatively distinguishable from the objects of experience both in veridical and hallucinatory perception'. We might think here of some religious or quasi-religious revelatory experience after which all ordinary experience was claimed to be, in some sense, a sham and delusive. However, when we remember Ayer's views on religion etc. we might suspect that this is not the sort of course which might recommend itself to him.

We now come to the last two sorts of basis on which Ayer claims that experience is not of material objects but rather of sense-data. The first of these concerns 'the variations in the appearance of an object which may be due to perspective, the condition of the light, the mental or physical state of the observer, the presence of some distorting medium, or any combination of these factors'. The second Ayer distinguishes as the 'more general point' that 'the way things appear to us is never just a consequence of their own nature. It is causally dependent also on their environment, or such factors as the state of the light, and on our own mental and physical conditions'. I must confess, however, that I am unable to see two distinct sorts of basis here at all. What Ayer distinguishes as 'the more general point' simply seems to repeat the original observations. I shall, therefore, treat these bases together.

The first thing we might note here is that these sorts of considerations look, at least prima facie, a good deal more promising

for the sense-datum theorist than either of those sorts drawn from the facts of misidentification and total hallucination. For so-called 'perspectival distortions' etc. enter, in a quite pervasive way, into virtually all visual experience. There is nothing one can look at which is not being affected in at least one of the ways mentioned. Consequently, no dubious inferences from a few isolated cases are called for as they were in the instances of hallucination etc. Indeed, we might wonder why the instances of misidentification and hallucination have had so much emphasis from the sense-datum theorist at the expense of the quite commonplace 'distortions' here appealed to. It is incidental to our argument but it might be worth suggesting here that the misidentification cases may have seemed much stronger when no clear distinction between knowledge and experience was recognized. Further, the very pervasiveness of the effects of 'perspectival distortion' etc. might have counted against their use here for they are barely noticed in contrast to cases of misidentification and hallucination which are nothing if not tinged with an element of drama.

Let us then see precisely why it should be thought that such 'distortions' establish that experience is not of material objects. The point here seems to be that when, as we would ordinarily put it, I see a penny from an angle I actually see something which is elliptical. But the penny, i.e. the material object, is not elliptical but round. Therefore, it cannot really be the material object which I see. This is where Ayer's argument from continuity <u>does</u> seem justified for it would be implausible for a direct realist to accept that when we 'see a penny from an angle' what we really see is a sense-datum but when we see it from the top 'looking round' what we suddenly see is the penny itself, i.e. the material object.

However, it might be asked, as Ayer does, 'Why when a round object looks elliptical to me, because I am seeing it from an angle, or a red object looks purple in the evening light, should I have to be seeing anything that is really elliptical or really is purple?'(I). Indeed, there has been a tendency, in the spirit of Austin's ordinary language approach, to suggest that we can parse away our difficulties if we admit things appearing but refuse to hypostatize appearances. Thus we should say that we see the penny which is round appearing elliptical but avoid saying that we see anything, e.g. an appearance, datum or whatever, which is elliptical. Rightly, I think, Ayer is dissatisfied with this approach. He asks 'If we are seeking a clear view of the facts which are supposed to verify our perceptual judgements, can we be satisfied with saying no more than that we perceive various sorts of things, including physical objects, which sometimes appear to have properties that they do not really have?'. Ayer intends this as a rhetorical question and does not explicitly answer it or give reasons for the negative response which he himself clearly expects. Professor Chisholm has, however, presented explicit arguments for such a response.

In his paper entitled 'The Theory of Appearing'(2), the title referring to the theory which refuses to hypostatize appearances, Chisholm claims that the most convincing version of the theory holds that appearing is relational and 'that "appearing pink to" designates a relation which obtains between the menu and me when I put on these odd glasses and look'. His next move is to ask 'What things may be appeared to?' and he reasonably answers 'that the only things which may be appeared to are human beings and other organisms endowed with the appropriate sort of sense-organs and nervous systems'. But then it would seem to follow that 'in those portions of the universe where there

(I) See 2, p. 75. (2) See 7, p. I02.

are no observers, or where no one is observing, nothing appears'. Chisholm then asks 'Are unexperienced roses red?' and he answers for the theorist of appearing that 'roses may be said to be red in the sense that they have powers or dispositions to appear red to certain sorts of observer; but they don't appear red when no one is looking'. Now the stage is set for Chisholm to claim that on the theory of appearing under discussion 'it is an objective property of the external thing to be able to appear as it does to observers like us; but the property(I) is subjectively dependent in that the object cannot appear in any way unless observers are present'. But then Chisholm concludes that the theory of appearing here leads to sceptical problems of just the sort invited by the sense-datum theory. He notes that the sense-datum theory claims that sense-data represent other parts of nature but asks 'How do we know that we have a faithful representation'. He quotes an advocate of the theory of appearing, Mr Murphy, who claims that 'our being appeared to provides us with a "fair sample" of other parts of nature' and asks how we can know that here we have a 'fair sample'. Chisholm concludes that the 'treatment of unperceived objects, on this version of the theory of appearing, is indistinguishable from that of dualism and thus they retain their qualitative vacuity'.

A couple of points might be made briefly here. First the ordinary language philosopher may just refuse to go with Chisholm into the area of 'metaphysical' talk about appearing being relational etc. However, we have already seen reason to be suspicious of this sort of refusal. More important, it might be held that by his talk of properties Chisholm quietly lets in by the back door just those sorts of thing which the theory of appearing was supposed to eliminate.

Interestingly enough, in his more recent work, Chisholm rejects the

(I) My italics.

hypostatization of appearances in favour of some sort of theory of appearing. In both Perceiving and Theory of Knowledge he rejects the assumption, which he accepted in his earlier essay, that 'x appears scarlet' entails that there is something which is scarlet. Chisholm(I) then attempts to eliminate references to appearances by the conversion of ordinary sentences like 'Something appears white to me' into 'I am appeared white to' etc. The claim is that, in such conversions, the word 'white' does not function as an adjective and that the sentence does not say of any entity that it is white. 'The words are used here to describe ways of appearing, or being appeared to, just as "swift" and "slow" may be used to describe ways of running'. We can note the theoretical convenience of such a conversion but questions of truth and even plausibility remain. For does it really seem true that when something appears scarlet there is nothing, absolutely nothing which is scarlet? Can one, with any plausibility, look at an object appearing crimson and say, with one's hand on one's heart, that there is absolutely nothing crimson there? Isn't it the case that when a rose appears red to me I actually see, am aware of, red? And when that same rose appears to me crimson don't I actually experience crimson? That is, the object of my experience, whatever its precise nature, is crimson. And here we come to our own reason for siding with Ayer and rejecting the theory of appearing and other similar attempts to avoid our problems. The reason being that such theories fail to do justice to what seem to be the facts of our experience. For to say in such a case as the one above that I see a rose which now appears red and now crimson but that there is not any red or crimson thing at all to be experienced seems quite inadequate to experience.

Indeed, the general point may be made here both with regard to

(I) See 8, p. 30.

Austin's sort of approach and the 'language games' approach of Wittgenstein that whatever the prima facie convenience of these approaches we are bound to feel them unsatisfactory if they do not, in the end, do justice to what we take our experience to be. Of course, it might be argued that there are no experiences independent of language and that language, in some profound sense, creates experiences. We have already noted in our discussion of the distinction between experience and conceptualization that this sort of view is rich in solipsistic implications of its own and so they do not require elaboration here. Enough now to note simply that we here take as a datum the realist view that objects of experience, the given, the world, reality, call it what you will, have an independent existence which does not rest on our linguistic ability. We might also note here that just about any puzzle could be 'dissolved' in this linguistic fashion if we were prepared to disregard sufficient of what we took the facts of experience to be.

Further, the assumption that wherever we have a philosophical problem it arises simply out of a confusion of two or more discrete 'language games' carries the same stultifying and dogmatic implications as Austin's ordinary language approach used indiscriminately. Our initial approach to the world may appear to be relatively piecemeal and to take the form of discret 'language games' but such discretion would not be a strength and certainly not a panacea to be unreflectingly appealed to in an attempt to dissolve philosophical problems. Indeed it is hard to see how we could find our way around in thought and get our conceptual bearings, i.e. use the 'language game' relevant to the circumstances, if there were absolutely no connections between 'language games' to guide us. In the absence of such guides surely the result would be analogous to the state of someone dropped blindfold into a maze,

i.e. bewilderment. Admittedly, it may turn out, on investigation, that some connections are more complex than we at first thought, others suspected may turn out not to exist at all while others which lay unsuspected are discovered. Nevertheless, it is one web with which we are concerned and it would seem to be at least part of the philosopher's task to get clear about its precise structure. In the present context our particular task is to get clear about the connections between our common beliefs about our awareness of the surfaces of material objects and scarcely less common reflections on the nature of perspectival distortions etc. Simply to claim that here we have two discrete 'language games', the game of common sense talk and the game of talk in terms of perspectival distortions etc., and that we should keep them discrete and consequently avoid our puzzles hardly seems satisfactory. Again we can note that any puzzle can be 'dissolved' simply by claiming that the elements which comprise it belong to discrete 'language games'. Indeed, we might wonder here what the claim that we have here two discrete 'language games' rests on. If it is simply the fact that a puzzle has arisen then this, as we have noted, seems hardly sufficient. For how could we ever know a priori that the puzzle was not soluble without recourse to talk of 'language games'? However, if it is not merely the fact that a puzzle has arisen which prompts the thought that here we have two 'language games' then the suggestion seems to be that it is possible to assume some sort of comprehensive position from which 'language games' can be judged as related or discrete. That is, that there is a comprehensive 'language game' which itself speaks of 'language games'. But this would seem to be a denial of the absolute discretion claimed. For all 'language games' of which our comprehensive 'language game' speaks, even those it claims to be absolutely discrete, must be somehow

related for each must be related within the fabric of the more comprehensive 'language game'.

We can conclude this chapter with a brief review. We began by noting that Descartes' most celebrated arguments were directly concerned with what we could know rather than the precise nature of the objects of experience. We then noted that while Austin's treatment of Ayer's arguments was less than totally convincing Ayer's arguments, or at least some of them, were vitiated by the common confusion of knowledge with experience, i.e. the distinguishable elements which gave us our title for the present chapter. There remained, however, the arguments from colour variation and perspectival distortion etc. which seemed to give more promise of yielding the conclusion that the objects of experience are never material objects. And, indeed, we have just seen that objections to the arguments from colour variation etc. made in terms of theories of appearing etc. are also less than totally compelling. Let us then try a different approach to the arguments from colour variation and perspectival distortion etc.

CHAPTER 6 DIRECT SURFACE REALISM

Arguments from Perceptual Variation

In this chapter we shall try to counter various arguments frequently adduced in support of the claim that experience is never of material objects. In this way we shall try to maintain our common beliefs regarding the majority of our experiences, i.e. a position which may be called 'direct surface realism'. In this first section our concern will be with the arguments from peceptual variation, i.e. arguments from perspectival distortion, so-called, and colour variation. In the second section we will be concerned with arguments from time and causality.

It will be helpful if, in our discussion of the arguments from perceptual variation, we take the issues of shape and colour separately. We earlier noted that the argument in terms of shape might be put as follows. When, as we would ordinarily put it, I see a penny from an angle I actually see or am aware of something which is elliptical. But the material object, i.e. the penny, is round not elliptical. Consequently, it cannot really be the material object which I see or am aware of but something else, i.e. a sense-datum.

This argument, however, is vitiated by a confusion between two sorts of judgement. One sort of judgement is given in terms of what we might call 'two-dimensional conceptualization'. This sort of judgement's most conspicuous use is in the hands of the painter trained in the western academic tradition but it permeates our culture to an extent which accounts for our facility in the interpretation of paintings, photographs, architectural plans etc. and, less happily, the prima facie plausibility of such claims as 'When I see a penny from an angle the actual object of my experience is something elliptical'. This sort of judgement, for

its own special purposes, deliberately disregards the fact that one edge of the penny is nearer the observer than another, i.e. that the object of experience is a three-dimensional object set in three-dimensional space, and conceives it as forming a painterly pattern on a two-dimensional plane set at right angles to the observer's line of vision. The other sort of judgement here is judgement in terms of three-dimensions. However, while there are expressions for three-dimensional shapes of a very regular nature, e.g. sphere, hemisphere, pyramid, etc., when dealing with other three-dimensional objects we tend to have resort to ad hoc expressions like 'penny shaped', 'cat shaped', etc. This may partly account for the disregard of this sort of judgement.

The above argument for the sense-datum theory mistakes a judgement of some object conceived in terms of two dimensions for an appropriate and adequate account of the object of experience and wrongly concludes that the actual object of experience is a two-dimensional type of image and not a material object or, to be absolutely precise, the surfaces of a three-dimensional material object set in three-dimensional space.

That we have mastered the culturally agreed methods of projection here involved and can, consequently, conceptualize a scene glimpsed as a composition of two-dimensional shapes on a plane at right angles to our line of vision is no basis at all for the claim that what we are actually aware of are two-dimensional shapes and not the material objects themselves. It seems, then, that the argument from perspectival distortion does not force on us the conclusion that we are never aware of material objects in three-dimensional space but are only aware of two-dimensional sense-data. For it is easy to generalize our treatment of the penny case to all such alleged 'distortions'.

It might be argued, however, that if I can judge a penny as elliptical from one place and as circular from another then surely, before the penny can be judged so differently, what I am aware of must also differ. This, however, is to mistake what is involved in this sort of judgement. If, by way of analogy, we consider my concept of an ellipse as analogous to an elliptical shape inscribed on a piece of glass and placed before my eyes at right angles to my line of vision then the analogous argument might run as follows. If, on looking through the glass at the penny, I succeed in getting the edges of the penny to coincide with the inscribed image while from some other place the edges of the penny do not coincide then surely what is seen through the glass must differ. This argument, however, again hinges on the sort of confusion which we have already discussed, i.e. it involves disregarding the third dimension (the space between the glass and the penny) and thinking of the penny as projected onto the glass in accordance with the methods of projection already mentioned. In such cases, however, the edges of the penny only coincide with the inscribed image in a secondary sense of 'coincide', a sense which itself rests on the appropriate conceptual apparatus. The edges of the penny and the inscribed image no more coincide, in the primary sense of 'coincide', than do two billiard balls, six feet apart, literally touch when viewd at a suitable angle. It still seems, then, that there is nothing in the argument from perspectival 'distortion' to force us to conclude that we are never aware of the material objects in three dimensions which we commonly suppose but only of two dimensional, sense-datum type images. What, then, we are claiming here is that when I see a penny from what is ordinarily said to be 'an angle' (this expression itself rests on those culturally agreed conceptual systems already discussed) the actual object

of my experience is not a two-dimensional elliptical datum but some of the surfaces of a three-dimensional material object set in three-dimensional space.

We should note here that Dr Hursthouse has given a superficially similar treatment of the present issue and yet one which is, we may feel, essentially more in the spirit of the ordinary language approach(I). We should also note that our approach here is not that of the new realist. According to Hirst the new realist claims that 'all the various appearances of an object are its intrinsic, objective properties and are directly apprehended by the percipient. For example, the table which looks round to A and elliptical to B is intrinsically both round and elliptical'(2). The new realist then appeals to a selective theory of the nervous system the function of which is 'to select and reveal to the percipient one property from each set of properties, for example either the elliptical or the round shape of the table'. Clearly, however, the new realist, in saying that the table is intrinsically 'round' and 'elliptical' etc., is, himself, making just that same error which leads to the sense-datum theory. For to use the expressions 'round' and 'elliptical', expressions from the vocabulary of two-dimensional conceptualization, in the context of a putative description of a three-dimensional material object is, as we have already suggested, quite inappropriate. It is, then, not only, as Hirst objects, 'self-contradictory to say the table is intrinsically both round and elliptical' but inappropriate and even, in this context, strictly false to say either that it is 'round' or 'elliptical'.

Of course, in another context, e.g. in a furniture shop, it is perfectly intelligible to say that one would prefer a round table to a square one etc. But this is only because the methods of two-dimensional

(I) See I4, pp. 97-9. (2) See R. J. Hirst, 'Realism' in I0, p. 78.

conceptualization are already assumed. That is, the salesman assumes that one is talking of the judgement in terms of two dimensions which one would make of the table when viewing it in accordance with the culturally agreed methods of projection, i.e. from directly above it. It is also on such an assumption that we commonly talk of the 'real' shape of the table as being 'round' etc. 'Real' in such a context must be understood after this fashion. Thus one might ask the salesman if the table in the corner is just rectangular or perfectly square. He might answer that it is 'really square' but all he means by this is that a plan view of the table would involve drawing a square. In his discussion of perspective realism Hirst objects that 'it seems more plausible to treat some appearances as privileged; in some conditions we see the real shape, the round object appearing as it is - that is, round. It may be considered a weakness of the perspective theory that it does not take into account the fact that objects do seem to have real (measured) shapes...absolutely'. We do indeed treat some views as privileged, i.e. plan views, elevations, etc., but this is only for the conventional reasons already noted and not because they allow us to see some absolute reality which otherwise eludes us. Measurement too is imbedded in the very same sort of convention. After all, what is a ruler but a one dimensional device? When one checks the diameter of a table top one is applying a one dimensional standard unit of measurement in a conventional and learned way. Of course, it may be said that we can measure not just one dimension of a table but its length, width and height, i.e. three dimensions. Indeed one can but each time one is only measuring one dimension, say height, which rests on a convention involving such things as the angle at which the rule is to be held etc.

We have, then, tried to make clear that our position is not that of

the new realist. However, it is worth taking note of some more of Hirst's objections to the new realist for it might be thought that they could also be made valid objections to our approach. Hirst remarks, for example, that one difficulty for the new realist is that his theory 'does not really account for error'. Hirst claims in support of this that if 'we are always directly aware of actual characteristics of objects, what sense does it make to talk, as we do, of illusions, mistakes, or misperceptions?'. There are a number of points we can make here. The first and most obvious one, given what we have already said about the distinction between knowledge and experience, concerns Hirst's unwillingness to grant the new realist or representative realist the use of this distinction. For, otherwise, why should it be thought to follow from the fact that we are always directly aware of the actual characteristics of objects that we cannot make mistaken knowledge claims with regard to these characteristics of objects? In the context of our own approach, why should it be thought to follow from the fact that I am directly aware of particular surfaces set in three-dimensional space that I cannot make mistaken knowledge claims with regard to these surfaces? Indeed, it is our claim that this is precisely what the sense-datum theorist does, i.e. he is directly aware of the surfaces of three-dimensional material objects but he mistakes them for pieces of two-dimensional sense-data etc.

Also we can note with regard to our own approach that we have already made it clear that we are not claiming that we are <u>always</u> aware of the surfaces of three-dimensional material objects. For we have accepted the fact of some experience, hallucinations etc., as being of, ostensibly at least, non-material objects. Our specific concern here is with normal experience and the arguments from normal perspectival

'distortion' etc. Consequently, introduction of talk of illusions etc. into a discussion of normal experience in this way is irrelevant.

Hirst also objects to the new realist on the grounds that 'objects must be incredibly complex if they are to possess all these shapes... plus, presumably, qualities corresponding to the queer appearance of objects when one has taken mescaline or suffers from giddiness or double vision'. Again this does not affect our position for, as we have already seen, we actually deny that ordinary material objects like the penny are shallow ellipses or deep ellipses or round shapes etc. For to claim this is to fall into the same trap that got the sense-datum theorist started. However, this objection of Hirst's might also be reformulated in a way which does seem relevant to our position. It might, for example, be said that the penny must be incredibly complex if it is capable of being conceptualized two-dimensionally as a large, perhaps infinitely large series of two-dimensional shapes. But this seems now a rather silly objection for it is clear enough that the reason a quite simple three-dimensional shape could yield such a series of two-dimensional judgements, each member of which corresponds to a particular point in space from which the simple object could be viewed, is a function, not of any complexity in the object but of the nature of three-dimensional space.

As we have already noted the issue of 'the queer appearance of objects when one has taken mescalin or suffers from giddiness or double-vision' is not strictly relevant to the present discussion of normal experience. However, we may here suggest a way in which even these sorts of phenomena may be treated without resort to objects of an ostensibly non-material, sense-datum type. Presumably the argument for such experiences being of a sense-datum type would run something like this. In, for example, a case of double-vision it is obvious that there

is only one material object, e.g. a pen. However, it seems scarcely less obvious, at least at first, that there are two objects of experience. At least one, then, must be a sense-datum, i.e. a non-material object, and since it seems arbitrary to decide that one is a sense-datum while the other remains the material object the most reasonable course is to admit that they are both sense-data. There is, however, another way of approaching this. It is to deny that there are two objects of experience and to hold rather that there is one, i.e. the material object, seen twice but simultaneously. Indeed, this seems a rather natural way to put the matter when we remember that we call it 'double-vision' and 'seeing double', that is, seeing something twice and not seeing two things, e.g. sense-data, once each. Moreover, it is quite normal for us to talk of seeing some single thing twice in the context of a time difference, i.e. one sighting earlier, the other later. Why not, then, accept that it is legitimate to talk of seeing a single thing twice from two slightly different positions? What we see with one eye may well not coincide with what we see with the other eye but this is simply because we see from two eyes and not because the actual objects of experience are sense-data and not material objects. We might even generalize this approach to account for some of the effects in dizziness and even some effects of drugs. On such a generalized account the claim would not be, as the sense-datum theorist holds, that a confused pattern of sense-data provides the object of experience but rather that a number of ordinary, reasonably orderly objects are experienced in a very confused sort of way, i.e. in a way which may involve not just double-vision but poly-vision and partial vision etc.

Two final points before we move on to the issue of colour variation. First, we can note that our approach is also to be distinguished from

perspective realism which claims that the characteristics of material objects are relative properties. The claim is that 'the table is round from here, elliptical from there' etc. Again, however, we can note that the perspective realist, like the sense-datum theorist and the new realist, is using the inappropriate two-dimensional terms 'round' and 'elliptical' of a three-dimensional object. Second, we are not forgetting that another of Hirst's objections to the new realist involves what he alleges is the weakness of the selective theory of the sense organs etc., a theory on which the new realist places considerable weight, compared with the generative theory. However, we can leave treatment of this issue to our discussion of the argument from colour vatiation and the argument from causality for we have not, in the present case of shape, placed any weight on the selective theory. We will, however, in the context of colour, find it of considerable value.

The Argument from Colour Variation

The argument from colour variation might run as follows. When, as we would normally put it, I look at the surface of a material object the colour of which I am aware varies with a number of factors including such things as my position relative to the light and the nature and intensity of the light etc. However, the surface of the material object has not changed. Consequently, the actual object of my experience cannot be the surface of the material object but must be something else, i.e. a sense-datum. If we put this argument in terms of a particular case it might run as follows. At time tI, on looking at some surface, I saw scarlet. Now, at time t2, on looking at the same surface, I see maroon. The actual surface of the material object, however, it is assumed, has not changed, e.g. someone has not come and painted it

maroon. Consequently, at either and probably both times tI and t2 I cannot really be aware of the surface of the material object at all but only something else, i.e. a sense-datum.

Now, we can note, underlying this argument is the notion that, at best, a material surface can only be one colour, e.g. scarlet or maroon but not both, and it is drawn out of this assumption that if I first see scarlet and then maroon and the material surface in question has not changed then it must follow that on at least one occasion I cannot be aware of the material surface in question at all. We might be reminded here of the argument from shape which assumed that the penny could really only be one shape such as round and that in seeing anything which was not this shape, e.g. something which could be characterized as an ellipse, I could not be seeing the penny at all. We might wonder if the parallel noted here in connection with the arguments themselves might not be extended to their refutations. Indeed, this is what we shall suggest. For it seems that we need not accept that a material surface is really just scarlet any more than we need accept that a material object is really just round. Certainly, we do often speak of colours like scarlet <u>as if</u> they are quite simple, discrete qualities of a totally saturating kind whose presence on a surface excludes the possibility of the presence of any other such colour, e.g. maroon. And this certainly makes it seem that if a surface was scarlet then it could not also be maroon. However, we need not and, indeed, often do not think of colours in this way. For example, we frequently think of colours as complex, analyzable mixtures of a limited number of different primary elements. And this observation suggests that we might think of a material surface as at least in part comprising a number of such elements. The function of lighting conditions, sense-organs, etc. is then to act

selectively on the material surface revealing more of some elements and less of others in a way which accounts for the phenomena of 'colour variation' without entailing the conclusion that for at least much of the time it is not really the material surface at all which provides the object of experience but rather some sort of sense-datum. Our position is that our way of thinking of colours, as enshrined in the theory of their logical exclusion, is, if not mistaken, at least inappropriate to the description of material surfaces. This, in just the same way that talk of shapes as 'circular' and 'elliptical' etc. turned out to be inappropriate when our concern was with three-dimensional material objects. Just as the inappropriate use of shape words led to the bogus argument that since the penny is circular in any case where I do not see something circular I cannot be seeing the penny so the inappropriate use of colour words leads to the argument that since a surface is scarlet then in seeing any colour but scarlet I cannot be seeing that surface. It might be argued here that the plain fact of the matter is that colours are just such simple, saturating and mutually excluding qualities as those suggested. But this seems far from established and there are many examples which suggest the opposite. For example, it is part of the painter's task to look at colours and analyze them into their constituents.

Russell, to his credit, noted of the colours of his table that 'there is no reason for regarding some of these as more really its colour than others'(I) and we can also agree with him that 'we are compelled to deny that, in itself, the table has any one particular colour'(2). Where we part company with Russell is where he draws the conclusion that the table, 'in itself' as he puts it, is not really coloured at all. For we would say that the table has not 'any one particular colour' because it is, or at least its surfaces are, a

(I) See 22, p. 2. (2) My italics.

continuous range of colour acted on selectively, i.e. not generatively, in a way which allows us to account for so-called 'colour variation' without denying direct surface realism, i.e. the view that the object of experience is just the material surface as commonly thought.

Indeed, all the talk about 'real' colours here seems more and more artificial the more we dwell on the topic. Ayer has tried to devise a rather arbitrary way of establishing the 'real' colour of something on the basis of the conditions of maximum discrimination but it is not even clear that there are such conditions. For example, the colour temperature of particular lighting conditions means that some differences are discriminable while others are not. If the colour temperature alters the originally discriminable differences become indiscriminable while the others become discriminable. It seems to be a swings and roundabouts situation. Of course, just as in the furniture shop in the case of shape and talk of 'round tables', there are contexts in ordinary conversation where talk of 'real colours' is perfectly intelligible, e.g. the 'real colour' being the colour something appears in daylight as opposed to fluorescent light etc.

Now, once we have established that there is not any reason why a material surface cannot be a number or range of colours the function of the selective theory of the sense-organs, conditions, etc. is, as we have already noted, just to provide us with some means whereby some colours may be eliminated altogether, others may be filtered out to a degree and yet others are allowed to dominate. All this in a way which allows for variation in the composition of the colour we see. Hirst objects to the selective theory on the grounds that it is self contradictory to say that something is both green and blue. But, of course, our position is that it is not self contradictory and so this need not provide an

obstacle to us in adopting the selective theory. He also objects that objects must be 'incredibly complex' if they are to possess a number or range of colours. But, again, our point just is that material surfaces are complex and that it is a mistake to regard them as being saturated with some single simple quality of the sort already indicated. Hirst, we can allow, is correct to say that it is not clear how the nervous system selects one out of a number of various shapes but the same point surely cannot be made with regard to colour. For it is surely clear enough that it is the nature of the nervous system etc. which limits our experience to certain types of object and prevents it being of another type of object, e.g. prevents it being experience of an X-ray type or whatever. We can leave further discussion of Hirst's objections to the selective theory to our discussion of the argument from causality and to the last chapter.

In concluding our discussion of the argument from 'colour variation' we should note that it is important to be able to give a direct surface realist account of colours as well as shapes. For, of course, if we admit that in normal experience the colours we experience are not on the surfaces of material objects but are something of a sense-data type then <u>all</u> our visual experience would be of such a type and our best efforts to get some direct realist account of shape would have been undermined. For, in the last resort, colour and shape are inseparable and so if the colour is a sense-datum then so too must be the shape. No one could ever see a totally colourless shape.

The Arguments from Time and Causality

We come now to another sort of thought which may well lie behind the notion that the objects of experience are never the material objects which we commonly suppose. We are all familiar with the phenomenon of seeing a man far off beating a drum and yet still hearing the drumbeat when the drumstick is seen nowhere near the head of the drum. This, so we are told, is because sound takes longer to reach us than light. However, it is also held that light takes time to travel. For example, it takes eight minutes for the light of the sun to reach the earth. Again these observations prompt the thought that what we are immediately aware of cannot possibly be the material objects which we commonly suppose. For if I am looking at some object then what I actually see is not that material object as it is at the precise time at which I am looking. We get extreme cases of this in astronomy when we can see stars which may not even exist anymore. Does it follow, however, from the fact that at a later time t2 I see an object as it was at an earlier time tI that I am not actually immediately aware of that object at all? We naturally assume that we cannot have immediate experience of a thing across a tract of time but are we correct in this assumption? Speaking of this very point Chisholm remarks that 'we assume... that S can perceive a at t only if a exists at t. If we combine this assumption with what we know about the finite velocity of sound and light, perhaps we can derive the conclusion that no one perceives any of the things he thinks he perceives. But to assume that S can perceive a at t only if a exists at t is no more reasonable than to assume that S can receive or reflect light from a at t only if a exists at t'[(I)]. We can agree with Chisholm that the assumption with regard to perception may well be unreasonable but not for the reason he cites. For, since

(I) See 6, p. I53.

light takes time to travel it is perfectly easy to accept that S can receive light or reflect light from a at t even if a does not exist at t and yet feel that one cannot perceive, or be aware of, a at t if a does not exist at t. Indeed, it is precisely on this basis that the argument rests. Chisholm's treatment rests on assimilating the verb 'perceive' to the verbs 'receive' and 'reflect' but it is doubtful if someone who appeals to the argument from time will accept that this assimilation is justified. Perhaps, however, we can find a way to undermine the assumption here if we consider time as analogous to space. We do not assume that because a thing is removed from us in space this, by itself, requires that our experience of that thing cannot be immediate. For example, it is not usually considered grounds for the conclusion that I am not (immediately) aware of a table that that table is a number of feet away from me. Similarly, might we not hold that removal in time does not constitute any reason for denying (immediate) awareness or experience. We would, then, claim that in looking at a star many light years away and which, by the time one looks at it, has ceased to exist the(immediate)object of one's experience is the star and not some sense-datum. The fact that the star is removed from one in time, i.e. it may have ceased to exist many years ago, is no more reason to deny it as an object of experience than the fact that it is removed from one in space. Of course, the choice of a star here is just to take one of the more vivid examples. Precisely the same arguments would apply to our experience of tables etc. for even then the light takes some time to travel from the table to the observer.

We now come to the argument from causality. Austin, in Sense and Sensibilia, never mentioned this sort of argument and Ayer's remark that 'it is rather surprising that Austin makes no attempt at all to

measure the force of any such argument'[(I)] seems quite justified. This is especially so when we consider that philosophical pre-occupation with the problems of epistemology seems to have been, to some extent at least, correlated with the growth of the essentially causal scientific outlook over the past three-hundred years or so. Indeed, it would seem probable that most laymen, when asked why it may be thought that the objects of our experience are of a sense-data type and never material objects, would answer, not in terms of the arguments from illusion, perspectival distortion, etc. but in terms of the argument from causality. Let us see, then, precisely what this argument amounts to.

Light is reflected from some external material object towards the eye of an observer. The lens of the eye focusses the light onto the retina of the eye and the retina changes the light energy into electrical energy. This electrical energy is then carried along nerves to the brain where electro-chemical activity takes place. From this it is concluded that the subject is really not aware at all of the initiating external material object but is really only ever aware of something nearer the opposite end of the causal 'chain', i.e. the penultimate item which we call the sense-datum. Whether individual philosophers prefer to call this penultimate item a brain-state or an idea is not really relevant for us here. Hirst says that it 'is natural to suppose that the generation of the sensory experience and its sensum occurs at the end of the causal chain which extends from the object to my brain by way of sense-organs and nerves'. Indeed, this would seem to be the case; it is certainly common. However, we must ask here if such a supposition is true. For we have already noted that while the sort of conclusion to which this supposition leads looks <u>prima facie</u> unexceptionable it brings in its wake the greatest problems. Do we accept the sense-datum theory,

(I) See 3, p. 296.

and all its attendant puzzles in order to preserve our science (remembering that one of the puzzles is itself how sense-datum theory can be reconciled with a science based on what are initially assumed to be observations of ordinary material objects) or do we, at the cost of rejecting science, reject the sense-datum theory? Fortunately, I think that there is a way between the horns of this dilemma.

Let us start by considering the question 'How am I aware of the table?' and its possible responses such as 'Because the light is on' or 'Because my eyes are open'. Clearly, a vast number of responses could be made to this sort of question, each one specifying one of a vast number of conditions which have to be satisfied before I can be aware of the table. The important thing to note here, however, is that, far from entailing the view that I am, after all, not aware of the table at all, these sorts of responses presuppose that I am aware of the table. They are, after all, responses to the question 'How am I aware of the table?'. Now, this suggests that the issue of what one is aware of is a separable issue from that concerned with how one is aware. It does not follow from the fact that one is aware of the table because the light is on that what one is really aware of is the light. Similarly, it does not seem to follow from the fact that one is conscious because one has a brain within which there is electro-chemical activity that one is really just conscious of one's brain or its electro-chemical activity. It does seem as if the argument from causality rests on a confusion of what with how. We frequently want to answer the question 'What can you see?' in terms of ordinary statements reporting the sighting of ordinary material objects. In answering the question 'How do you see X?' we frequently want to answer in terms of such things as light, electrons, etc.

But when things are set out this way we might wonder why anyone might ever be inclined to confuse the answers to 'What?' with those to 'How?' and consequently conclude that the objects of experience cannot ever be the material objects which we commonly suppose. The answer to this lies in a certain picture of the world. The particular picture in question is that of a world that is essentially and fundamentally a complex of particles of more or less uniform type. These particles really provide the substance of the world. Material objects are composed of them and so is light, the lens of the eye, the retina and the brain etc. The particles of some material object initiate some movement which is communicated to the particles of light, this, in its turn, is communicated to the retina and so on until, at last, the subject gets its turn in the form of an experience only distantly related to the initiating material object.. It is this picture of the world as essentially and exclusively comprised of particles of more or less uniform type which form, quite literally, trains or chains from some external object to the subject which prompts the confusion of <u>what</u> with <u>how</u>. Now, we need not here deny particle theories in general. We might admit particle theories so long as they allow entities of another type, and perhaps an epistemologically prior type, a place in the world, e.g. material objects. However, some may well feel inclined to attempt a reduction of talk about light particles, electrons, etc. into talk of observations of ordinary material objects, e.g. voltmeters etc. It certainly is not clear that light particles or electrons etc. are, at least in any ordinary sense, observable and this may add something to the plausibility of such a reduction. Presumably, such a reductionist would be inclined to regard particle theories as the products of the imagination which provide us with useful models, aids to the

assimilation of causal data, but which, if taken as literally true, lead to difficulties. Such a reductionist would not be slow to point out that there are even areas in science itself where the value of the notion of a particle seems put severely to the test, e.g the ultimate nature of light, sub-atomic physics, etc. We can conclude, then, that we can accept all the causal sorts of statements found in ordinary and scientific talk without being committed to the sense-datum theory. What we do reject is the rather simplistic picture of the world as essentially and exclusively comprised of such particles as we have indicated prompts the substitution of answers to 'What?' with answers to 'How?'. It might be suggested here, however, that we need look no further for an account of the confusion of what with how than the great prestige which modern science attracts. However, I am inclined to think that prestige by itself is hardly sufficient for such a confusion. For so long as people avoided the simplistic particle theory indicated they could attach to modern science all the prestige they wanted and confusion need not arise.

We have, then, tried to show in this chapter that the principal arguments adduced in favour of the view that experience is never of material objects fail. Further, we have also tried to show precisely where and how they have gone wrong. In the case of shape 'variation' we noted that the argument rested on the mistaken notion that a judgement in terms of two-dimensional shape was appropriate to ordinary objects of experience. Similarly, in the case of colour 'variation' we noted that the argument rested on the mistaken notion that a judgement in terms of colour words taken to imply the presence of a simple, discrete, totally saturating and therefore excluding quality was appropriate to an ordinary material surface. The argument from time, we

held, rested on the assumption that removal in time prohibits experience of an object but we saw no more reason to consider this assumption justified than the view that removal in space prohibits the experience of an object. Finally, we noted that the argument from causality did not arise out of causality *per se* but rather out of a rather simplistic notion regarding the ultimate nature of the world. However, loose ends remain and in the next and final chapter we shall try to tie up some of the more obvious ones.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUDING SPECULATIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

The Nature of the Pure Subject

It takes no great thought to see the intimate connection between the simplistic particle theory and the generative theory of the sense-organs. On the selective theory we, as subjects, have, for at least much of the time, a clear view of material objects. On the generative theory we do not and our experience is really limited to changes at one end of the causal chain which are generated by other changes at the opposite end. Hirst argues that the generative theory is 'confirmed by the reproduction of such experiences in mental imagery (presumably because the appropriate brain activity recurs), by the sensations resulting from electrical stimulation of the brain'. Here, however, we must ask again why it should be thought to follow from the fact that certain experiences can be caused by stimulation via electrodes etc. that no experience is of material objects.

However, there is another point which may be made by the advocate of the generative theory. He may concede that there is a certain plausibility in saying, as we do on the selective theory, that we get a clear view through to material objects from the front of our eyes. But he might remind us that behind the eyes are nerves, brain and other tissue. He might then suggest that the subject resides somewhere around the brain or is conscious from somewhere around the brain, i.e. behind this mass of opaque tissue. He might then ask how it can be plausibly held that we, as subjects, can see directly through all this tissue to external material objects. Here we are led into the fascinating but profoundly difficult area of the nature of the pure subject. The first thing I think that we must note here is that it is not clear why it should be thought that the subject, even if it can be said to have any

spatial position at all, should be thought to reside somewhere in the middle of one's head. If we think of the nature of experience in a fairly common sort of way it seems clear that in normal sight we, as subjects, see from where our eyes are, hear from where our ears are, taste from where our tongues are and, perhaps most instructive of all, we feel with the entire surface of our bodies. The point being made here is that the subject cannot ordinarily be identified as something inside the head or as something experiencing from inside the head. Feeling a pain in my big toe is not like looking at a chair across the room. In feeling the pain I am not, as it were, up in my head feeling something sore about six feet away. The subject feels at the point of pain. All, then, we can do is mark a number of points from which the subject gets its experience of the world. It is, no doubt, because in the case of four out of five senses the relevant organs are placed on the head somewhere that we feel that the head must somehow provide the residence of the subject or the place from which it is conscious. If our eyes were on our big toes we would not feel this so much. What we can note, however, is that the points from which it is possible to experience the world correlate, in a quite remarkable way, with the whole nervous system. It is probably this sort of observation which lies behind Wittgenstein's remark that if anyone could draw a picture of the 'soul' it would look like a drawing of the body. Also relevant here is Descartes' observation that he is <u>not</u> lodged in his body like a pilot in a ship.

The advocate of the generative theory might, however, point out that whatever <u>seem</u> to be the places from which we experience the world what we know of experimental physiology establishes that the subject <u>actually</u> experiences things from 'further back along the causal chain'.

The argument here would seem to be that if you sever, say, the optic nerve, which is behind the eye, blindness results and so the subject must see from behind the eye somewhere. Now we can certainly accept that blindness results from the severing of the optic nerves. However, we can ask how this, and similar evidence with regard to the rest of the nervous system, establishes that the subject is really aware from somewhere in the brain. How, precisely, does the view that I, as pure subject, am really aware from inside my brain follow from the fact that it is a condition of my seeing some external object that my optic nerves are intact and other similar conditions? It might seem to follow if we made the same sort of mistake which we earlier noted in connection with the arguments that the objects of experience are really brain states etc. There, we noted, the object of experience was confused with one of the causal conditions of experience. Here a similar confusion seems to have arisen between the subject of experience and a condition of experience or, at least, the locality of that condition, i.e. inside one's head, and the locality of the place from which the subject is aware which is also alleged to be inside one's head. We can similarly conclude, then, that it does not follow from any fact of experimental physiology that the subject is aware from somewhere inside the head. It only follows from such facts that it is a causal condition of a subject having experiences that certain conditions with regard to the inside of the head are satisfied. We would, then, hold that our selective theory also survives these particular objections.

Let us now turn to a thought which might be prompted by the observation, already made, that a quite remarkable correlation exists between the points from which it is possible to experience the world and the nervous system. Might it not be that the pure subject, as we have

been calling it, is identical with the nervous system? This question, in what seems to be the confused formulation of the mind/body problem, has been one of the most intransigent of all philosophical problems and it is not one which we can go into at any length here. However, if we just glance at it in terms of the subject and nervous system we may get a clue as to the cause of its intransigence.

The crucial thing to remember here is that the pure subject was originally conceived simply as the logical product of the form of experience, i.e. not as a thing with any empirical content whatsoever. We, like Hume, introspected in vain. Now this straightaway puts our problem in a fresh light for it turns out that we are asking ourselves if this pure subject, something devoid of any empirical content, is identical with a content, or possible content, of experience, i.e. the nervous system. But put this way is it not clear that this is a question which could have no resolution one way or the other? For how could one begin to establish an identity or, for that matter, a distinction between the subject, which has absolutely no empirical content, i.e. nothing to provide evidence one way or the other, with a content or possible content of experience? Given the nature of the subject it is necessarily impossible to identify it with any content of experience.

However, it might be asked, 'Although we began with the concept of the subject as something without any empirical content can we not now, via reflection on the nature of experience, give it some empirical content in terms of the places from which the world is experienced? Might we not just say that the subject is at the places from which it is experiencing things, i.e. points on the nervous system?' In order to answer this we must dwell a little further on the nature of

experience. Normally, when we are fully awake we are aware from the eyes, ears, tongue, nose and tactually and kinaesthetically aware with virtually the whole of the body. If we accept the suggestion under consideration it would then be said that the subject occupies more or less just that space occupied by the body. However, it would be possible, via anaesthetics, to obliterate all tactile and kinaesthetic sensation while leaving all other sensations alone. Now the subject, according to our suggestion, would not occupy the whole body but six quite discrete areas, i.e. the two eyes, the two ears, the nose and the tongue. Now, if we want to maintain that the subject is actually at the places from which it is experiencing the world we have to say now that it is in six different places at once and nowhere in between those places. But now the question arises 'How can the subject, i.e. a single thing, which is, ex hypothesi, capable of spatial position be in six quite different places at once but nowhere in between those places?'. It is hard to find any sensible answer to this question and so we can conclude that, as we at first suspected, the pure subject cannot itself be given any spatial position although it remains quite in order to identify places from which it is aware. A similar point can be made in terms of time. A subject cannot be said to occupy temporal position any more than it can be said to occupy a spatial one. However, it can experience from discrete temporal points, i.e. times separated by periods of total unconsciousness, e.g. sleeping, just as it can experience from discrete spacial ones. This is important for it gives us a way of distinguishing subjects one from the other and resisting the pull towards an impersonal subject of the Kantian kind. For example, I am the subject which sees the world from here now and you are the subject which sees the world from there now. The subject itself, however, remains totally devoid of empirical

content and, consequently, not a candidate for identification with any empirical content whatsoever. The attempt at such an identification, or even at the distinction, is an attempt, not unknown in philosophy, to transcend experience and the consequence is a perplexing confusion of a typically philosophical kind. Whether the subject and the nervous system, or any other empirical item, are identical or distinct is not a real issue. For the subject is necessarily devoid of any empirical content.

Kant's Transcendental 'I'

We have just mentioned the subject as something which itself is necessarily devoid of any empirical content whatsoever and throughout the dissertation, since we first introduced it in our discussion of the concept of experience, the notion of a pure subject has borne considerable weight. From time to time, however, we have also spoken of Kant's notion of the transcendental self and in these places we have adopted a rather cool, non-committal tone. Some may have felt a tension here which we must now try to relax.

The crucial point here is that while our pure subject and the Kantian transcendental self are both transcendental insofar as neither is a possible empirical content they are <u>not</u> to be identified. Such a mistaken identification is prompted by the rather simplistic, dualistic distinction between the 'transcendental self' and the 'empirical self'. For it is thought, if our personal self or subject is not the empirical one then it must be <u>the</u> transcendental one and there is an end to it. However, it is frequently noted that Kant's use of the personal expression 'the transcendental <u>self</u>' is misleading and that his meaning would be better cought by the use of the impersonal expression 'one' or 'consciousness in general' etc. Thus Kant's transcendental self is not any particular personal subject and he is, consequently, able to claim that <u>all</u> experiences belong to the transcendental self without committing obvious falsehood. We have, then, a distinction between the transcendental impersonal self of Kant and our non-empirical particular or personal subjects of experience and a further distinction between these and empirical selves which, whatever they are, must be empirical contents or <u>objects</u> of experience. We have then three items and not just two. First, we have the Kantian transcendental self, i.e.

consciousness in general, which has all experience. Second, we have our particular personal subjects of experience each of which has only some experience. Third, we have an empirical self which must, somehow, be an object of experience. Here we might have in mind, as well as the body, behavioural characteristics and thoughts and desires etc. of which the personal subject is conscious. It might be argued that since neither the Kantian transcendental self nor our pure personal subject have any empirical content whatsoever there cannot possibly be any basis for distinguishing them. However, while we have just noted that it does not seem correct to attribute to the personal subject itself any spacial or temporal position it does seem possible to say that it sees from such and such a place at such and such a time. This gives us, as we have also noted, a way of distinguishing pure personal subjects one from the other and, consequently, also a way of distinguishing the notion of a pure personal subject from the Kantian notion of the transcendental self.

Perhaps this is the time to note very briefly a role played by the transcendental self in Kant's philosophy for it seems quite pertinent to the topic of solipsism. For certain features of Kant's philosophy have a strong solipsistic pull and part of the function of the transcendental self is to resist this pull. A fundamental feature of Kant's philosophy is his view that contradictions reside in the common supposition that space and time are objective realities which exist outside and quite independent of mind. Kant claimed to have shown these contradictions clearly in the 'Antinomy of Pure Reason'(I) and he concluded that space and time cannot be objectively real but must rather be subjective forms inhering in 'the subject' and within which experience is presented. As Kant writes space and time are 'in us, prior to experience' and 'the

(I) See I5.

subject in which the representation of time has its original ground'. Consequently, insofar as the objects of experience, e.g. material objects, are spatio-temporal entities they too must be, in some sense, subjective.

The solipsistic tendency of this view of normal material objects or phenomena as being subjective seems clear enough. For if such spatio-temporal objects are subjective and there were no impersonal mind or subject of the sort represented by Kant's transcendental self but only discrete personal subjects then it might well seem that each such subject will inhabit its own discrete spatio-temporal world. Again, if, at this point, we introduce the notion that the limits of sense are provided by the limits of experience then there does not, for such a subject, seem to be sense to talk and thought of other spatio-temporal worlds, each with its own supporting subject. We seem to be back with metaphysical solipsism.

Since, however, Kant does maintain his transcendental self it becomes possible for him to resist this pull and claim that while phenomena are subjective they do not inhere in any particular personal subject but simply in the transcendental self, i.e. consciousness in general. Indeed, in his refutation of idealism Kant explicitly holds that phenomena must be independent of particular knowing individuals. However, what, precisely, the notion of the transcendental self or consciousness in general amounts to is not so clear. It cannot simply be an aggregate of individual subjects for, as we have suggested, such an aggregate would seem capable of sustaining a number of private phenomenal worlds. For some omniscient, transcendent being these worlds may well form a pattern in which he could see mirrored the noumenal world of Kantian things in themselves which remained hidden behind human experience. However, for a truly public, yet ultimately

(I) See I5.

subjective or transcendentally ideal world in which numbers of individual, knowing human subjects can share we need more than just numbers of such subjects. With this in mind the transcendental self of Kant must be something more like Berkeley's God or the Absolute of post-Kantian German Idealism. This is, perhaps, a less immediately engaging prospect.

It might be wondered if we could not find some compromise position between the objectivity and subjectivity of time and space by talking of the intersubjectivity of time and space. The spatio-temporal world which depends on my mind might be held to 'converge' in some way with the worlds of other subjects. One problem here, however, lies in giving much content to the notion of convergence, and its correlative notion of divergence, in the absence of time and space. A further problem would seem to involve the notion of intersubjectivity itself. Despite the fact that the notion is made to bear a considerable amount of weight in some contemporary philosophy, at this level, at which our concern is with the essential and fundamental nature of experience, it begins to look like straightforward subjectivity thinly disguised in an attempt to avoid the absurdity into which straightforward subjectivism leads.

Fortunately, we need not now feel ourselves forced to admit the Kantian transcendental self in an attempt to avoid solipsism for it is now generally agreed(I) that Kant was mistaken in thinking that space and time, conceived as objective realities, did indeed involve inherent contradictions. Consequently, if, in accord with this, we reject the requirement that spatio-temporal objects of experience must be subjective certain features of Kant's philosophy which remain, i.e. his view that at least some experience must be experience of spatio-temporal

(I) See 24, p. 7.

objects enjoying a sustained existence independent of any particular knowing subject, collapse back into a view close to the common suppositions with which we began our dissertation. If, on the other hand, we cling to the subjectivity requirement but reject the notion of the transcendental self then, as we have seen, we seem to collapse back in the opposite direction into solipsism. These two opposite tendencies seem to account for much of the richness and complexity of the Kantian tradition as it passes through Schopenhauer into the early Wittgenstein. And that, of course, is the Wittgenstein who, as we already noted(I), seemed to be the target for the later Wittgenstein's remark that the 'solipsist', as he called him, did not deny any empirical reality but simply required a new notation.

We can now conclude our discussion with a brief review. We began by noting that certain considerations are sometimes taken to establish that experience is never of material objects as commonly supposed but of other things referred to as sense-data. We then noted that, when coupled with empiricist theses regarding the limits of knowledge and sense, this sense-data thesis seemed to lead to quite dramatic challenges to common belief in the forms of what we called 'epistemological solipsism' and 'metaphysical solipsism', However, we also allowed that many philosophers have claimed the sense-data thesis to be quite reconcilable with common belief. Principal among these were representative realists and phenomenalists. For the purposes of this dissertation we accepted that the empiricist theses of knowledge and sense, roughly stated as they were, had some essential core of truth to them and our principal concern was with the sense-data thesis and some intimately related notions.

We then attempted, by means of discussion of the notions of

(I) See above p. 57.

experience, sense-data, material objects and sensibilia, to clarify the issues which, so far, had only been roughly indicated. In the course of this conceptual clarification we introduced a distinction between what we called 'experience' on the one hand and, on the other, conceptualization, judgement, belief and knowledge etc. This was a distinction to which we had reason to return a number of times in the course of the dissertation. We also here found our concerns expanding to cover the notion of sensibilia. We then noted that the arguments in favour of the view that experience is specifically of sense-data themselves required that the sense-data thesis be reconciled with common belief about the world. We then argued that neither representative realism nor phenomenalism seemed at all convincing in their attempts to reconcile the sense-data thesis with common belief and that the thesis that experience is of sensibilia seemed to be no more satisfactory.

We discussed two of the most celebrated treatments of issues which seemed relevant to us, Wittgenstein's treatment of the sense-data thesis in the private language argument and Professor Strawson's views on the conditions necessary for the ascription of predicates as they bear on the issue of solipsism. We did not find either of these treatments ultimately convincing. However, we did note that there seemed to be some internal incoherence, at least in the case of the metaphysical solipsist.

Eventually, in view of the difficulties into which the theses of sense-data and sensibilia, when coupled with our empiricist views of knowledge and sense, seemed to lead, we submitted to a thorough examination the reasons normally adduced in favour of the general view that experience is never of material objects as we might commonly think. First, we had reason, once again, to return to our distinction between

experience and conceptualization, knowledge, etc. in order to show, both with reference to Descartes and Ayer, that nothing really follows about the nature of the objects of experience from the limits of human knowledge. It was, therefore, a mistake to think that the thesis that experience was not of material objects could be straighforwardly established from certain sceptical claims with regard to knowledge. It did seem, however, that there were more promising reasons for thinking that experience was never of material objects as commonly thought. Relevant here were the arguments from, so-called, 'perceptual variation', the argument from time and the argument from causality. None of these, however, were found to be finally convincing and we concluded that all the phenomena which gave rise to them can be accounted for in a way which does not commit us to denying the common belief that we are frequently aware of the surfaces of material objects. In this way, by rejecting the general thesis that experience is never of material objects, we closed both the specific sense-data route to solipsism and the route to other problems prompted by the sensibilia thesis. And indeed, although we did continue with a brief discussion of the nature of the subject of experience, our principal conclusion was that the objects of experience are, for most of the time at least, material objects.

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